

Success Story: Prescott, WI

Borner Farm Project and Carpenter Nature Center Partner to Bring Garden-Based Learning to Malone Elementary Students



For years, Malone Elementary School students in Prescott, Wisconsin have had access to top-quality outdoor education thanks to annual field trips each season at Carpenter Nature Center. This school year, a creative collaboration with Carpenter Nature Center, Malone Elementary School, and Borner Farm Project expanded outdoor education for first graders to include garden-based learning.

For 35 years, Carpenter Nature Center has been educating students in the Prescott school system. Currently, all Malone Elementary School students from pre-K through 5th grade go to the nature center three times each year for seasonal programs that build on students' classroom curricula. "Our main goal is bringing people to the outdoors to heighten awareness and incorporate stewardship aspects to help people learn more about their own backyards and surroundings and inspire kids to take care of the Earth," said Mayme Johnson, Carpenter Nature Center's Program Director.



In 2013, Borner Farm Project purchased land just blocks from Malone Elementary School. Diane Webster, founder and director of Borner Farm Project, was familiar with the educational programs at Carpenter Nature Center. "Ever since we moved to Prescott I've spent a lot of time over at Carpenter," said Webster. "I've been so impressed. They have continuing classes and workshops. they teach and work in the community at the same time."

A decade after starting Borner Farm Project, Webster was ready start incorporating educational components for youth at her site. However, unlike Carpenter Nature Center, the farm did not have staff trained in developing curricular activities.

The timing was right for Veronica Justen, a parent of children in the Prescott school district and Wisconsin School Garden Network's Northwest Regional Coordinator.

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Justen saw an opportunity to bring garden-based education to Malone Elementary School through Carpenter Nature Center's existing outdoor education programming in partnership with the nearby Borner Farm Project. "The school has no garden. So this seemed like a way to give the students farm and garden education," explained Justen. She organized meetings with school administrators to talk about potential for collaboration with the nature center and farm, and sought funding so that a field trip to the farm would not add an additional financial burden on local families. United Natural Foods, Inc. provided funding to allow Carpenter Nature Center staff develop curricular activities for 1st graders visiting the farm consistent with Next Generation Science Standards and teach the children during field trips to the farm.



"Borner Farm Project has the farm," said Johnson. "And we have the naturalist staff with the training to develop age-appropriate educational programs. The result is that 90 kids got to taste the vegetables right on the farm. We hope this will become a regular part of the elementary school curriculum."

"I was blown away by how well organized it was and how fun it was for the kids," raved Webster. "Kids learned about the price of the plants and plant life cycles. We took them out into the compost area, which was a highlight for them. We listened to the compost piles and could hear the worms! We walked through the gardens and pulled up some carrots for kids to taste. I didn't see a single kid that wasn't participating and engrossed in the process."

Both Johnson and Webster see potential to incorporate farm- and garden-based education into the Malone Elementary School curricula. Their hope is that this collaboration can continue for first graders and, eventually, expand to include more elementary school students.

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