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Natural Progression



By Michael Clevenger, The Courier-Journal

Kimberly Jones of Danville held her son, Morgan Jones, as he played with a sound pole yesterday at the new visitor center at Bernheim Forest. It's designed to better connect people with nature.

Visitor center dedicated at Bernheim Forest

By Rebecca Neal

Special to The Courier-Journal

With his mother's help, 18-month-old Morgan Jones grabbed a sound pole in the new Visitor Center at Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest and giggled as the noise of chirping birds filled the air.

"He loves anything that makes noise, and this is perfect for him," said Kimberly Jones of Danville.

The center, which was dedicated

yesterday in Bullitt County, was designed to seamlessly connect people with nature, said David Imbrogno, Bernheim's executive director.

"We wanted a building to blend into the landscape," he said. "We want to attract people, but then push them outside to explore."

The center was designed to be environmentally friendly, he said. Its windows are angled to maximize light and heat; the building was constructed from recycled materials, including



Marion Stoner, 5, explored the grounds of the new visitor center at Bernheim Forest. The center offers activities to help both children and adults learn about nature.

beams made from old Heinz pickle vats and a ceiling of wood from former Jim Beam bourbon rack houses.

Other improvements at Bernheim offer visitors new opportunities to explore the 14,000-acre forest. New trails take hikers around Lake Nevin and Inspiration Knob, while visitors to the research center can learn about greenhouses and nurseries.

Marie Chamer of Elizabethtown explored the new additions with her daughter, Tiffany Vair, and her grandson, 4-year-old Caleb Vair.

Carrying a tree seedling and a bag of wildflower seeds the center was giving away, the longtime Bernheim visitor said she was awed by the center.

"I never dreamed Bernheim would come this far," she said.

She laughed as her grandson danced to the beat of drummers outside and talked to his mother about his favorite parts of the forest.

"I like the frog pond," he said. "A frog jumped out at me. I was careful where I stepped. I didn't step on the frogs."

Imbrogno said the projects were designed to get children

away from video games and get them outside.

"Kids don't play outside anymore, and that's how they connect with nature," he said.

Special exhibits allow children and adults to take an interactive look at the forest. Visitors can check out handheld computer field guides, which can read tags placed around the grounds. The computers provide information about plants, animals and other aspects of the forest.

Ed Schlossberg of New York City-based ESI Design led the creation of the new exhibits. He said they're designed to make science fun and easily accessible. "Sometimes people get very serious when talking about science and ecology, and there is not an opportunity for learning," he said. "These exhibits make nature fun, and people can appreciate learning."

Some visitors enjoying the festivities were drawn to Bernheim just because of yesterday's pleasant weather.

"I did not know about the opening today when I decided to come, and I think I am lucky to be here," said Mima Lee of St. Matthews. "I walked around the grounds and it is so beautiful."