

# Lakeview

## NEIGHBORS

SEPTEMBER 2019

### FOSTERING A LOVE OF NATURE:

Tara Von Dollen Leads New  
Preschool Program at Aldo  
Leopold Nature Center



Best Version Media

COVER PHOTO BY TIM FITCH PHOTOGRAPHY



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# Dear Residents,

I hope you and your family had a wonderful summer!

As kids head back to the classrooms this fall, Lakeview Neighbors features a new preschool program at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center in Monona. We get to know Tara Von Dollen, the Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool Director leading the new program opening its doors this September. To learn more, see page 4.

Also, there are many events taking place throughout September. Be sure to check out the events calendar on page 8 and different activities offered at the libraries on page 10.

Do you have announcements you would like to have published in your neighborhood magazine?

I would be happy to help you share news or listings with your neighbors. Also, as we begin a new season, remember neighborhood kids can post their fall jobs in the magazine. As always, if you have an article submission or would like to nominate a neighbor to be published in the magazine, feel free to reach out to me at the email below.

Thank you for helping us bring people together!



*Erin Vander Weele*

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# Fostering A Love of Nature:

## Tara Von Dollen Leads New Preschool Program at Aldo Leopold Nature Center

BY ERIN VANDER WEELE | PHOTOS BY TIM FITCH PHOTOGRAPHY



Aldo Leopold once said, “When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

The Aldo Leopold Nature Center’s new preschool program in Monona, opening its doors this September, aims to foster love and respect for the diverse natural and human communities to which we all belong.

Tara Von Dollen, the Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool Director, is leading the new program where play-based and nature-based learning intertwine to create a rich, seasonally-based curriculum. The program incorporates aspects of a few different approaches to education including Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia.

“We want all children to become lifelong learners and reach their maximum potential, and we believe that a love of learning and growth across all domains can be nurtured at a very young age through play and discovery,” Tara explains.

Tara’s role as ALNP Director has been to create and develop the program, with guidance and help from ALNC Director, Virginia Wigger. The Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool (ALNP) Statement of Purpose is to provide high-quality, developmentally-appropriate early childhood experiences that foster a love of nature and a lifelong, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

“Young children especially need quality time in nature to support whole child development and to nurture their inborn sense of wonder,” Tara adds. “In nature you can find many different kinds of structures, a wide range of textures and smells, many animals, critters and plants, numerous opportunities for risk-taking and new levels of amazement. Nature is a very interesting and engaging place that can maximize learning as children face and conquer challenges that give them strength and confidence.”

Tara holds a BS in Wildlife, Fish, Conservation Biology from the University of California-Davis, an Elementary Education Teaching Certificate from Sacramento State, and an M.Ed—Environmental Education from UW-Stevens Point. She also holds an Early Childhood Diploma from North American Montessori Center (NAMC). She has also worked as an assistant teacher at Toad Hill Montessori.

Working at Aldo Leopold Nature Center since 2010, she has made the Monona community part of her family life. Tara and her husband Steve have two daughters, Emma, age 11, and Annika, age 6. She says her educational experience and family life ultimately joined together with her career path when she found ALNC.

Together, Tara’s family shares a love of nature. She and Steve are currently working on transforming their lawn space into flower and vegetable garden areas with help from their daughters.

“We are proud of our Monarch Waystation sign,” Tara shares. “Our daughters helped name the plot, Hibernation Station. We raise Monarchs inside as we

find them outside on our milkweed plants. Emma and Annika are also developing their own green thumbs by starting seeds, and Emma tends her own garden plot in the backyard.”

Tara says the preschool all began as part of her project for her master’s degree, along with her desire to combine family life and environmental education. Her goal led to the development and teaching of the



*Emma, Annika and Tara love to sled, build forts and play in the snow. After several trips down the sledding hill, they flopped down to enjoy the sky and the soft snow.*



*Tara and family stop for a photo after biking Loop the Lake 2019.*

## COVER FEATURE

Wonder Bugs Preschool Program. Her daughter Emma was the first Wonder Bug and Annika was also able to participate with the family once she was old enough.

“Many people have positively commented on the flexibility of the Wonder Bugs Preschool Program to accommodate the extra wiggly kiddos; we do not require that everyone sits still,” Tara says. “The variety of indoor and outdoor activities and options are also a favorite. Passing along my enthusiasm for having fun while exploring outside has been the best. Adults are more willing to be buried in leaves, move like grasshoppers or notice the joys of bugs when they watch me and the other environmental educators happily doing it first.”

Tara says working at the nature center has been the “perfect union” of different and important areas of her life - family (children), nature, and connecting with the community.

“As ALNP Director, I am so grateful to have the opportunity to continue to grow the programming, forge new connections with even more families, and share my passion for nature and love of the outdoors with young children,” she shares. “I feel like I am making a difference in the community.”

*The family canoeing on Lake Monona for Father's Day.*

