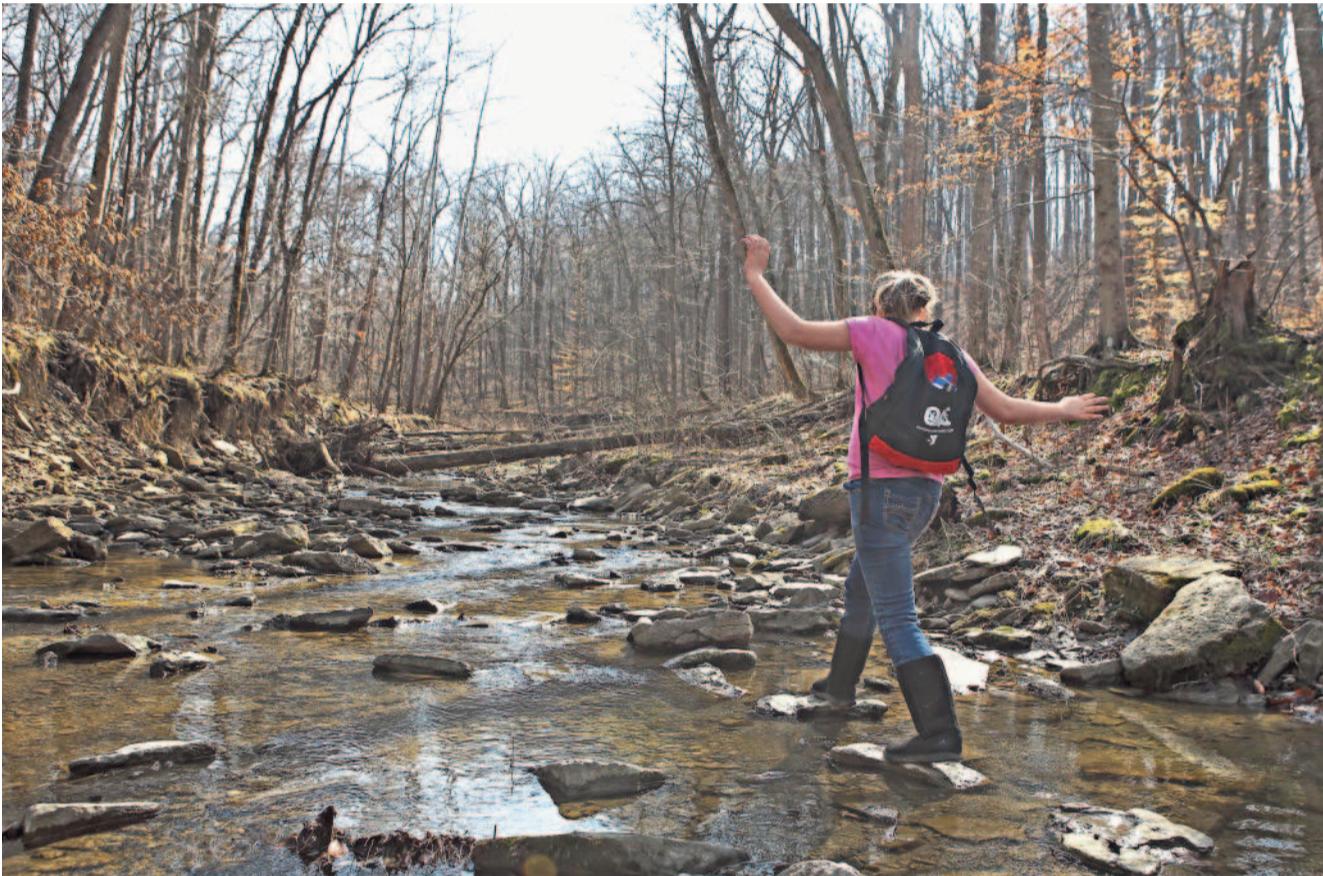


# BYE INVASIVES, HI WILDFLOWERS

[ NATURAL WONDERS, 18A ]

## more local + business



PHOTOS BY MEG VOGEL/THE ENQUIRER

Lauren Higgins crosses a creek at the Cincinnati Nature Center while on a 5-mile hike last month with the Outdoor Adventure Club.

## No child left inside: Making nature lovers of indoor kids

Reconnecting to nature has health benefits

Carrie Blackmore Smith  
csmith@enquirer.com

Thirty-six teenagers, two dogs and a slew of adult chaperones stood at a trailhead at the Cincinnati Nature Center as Denny McFadden prepped them for the 5-mile hike ahead.

"Just breathe in this fresh air and enjoy the serenity," the retired Cincinnati Public Schools teacher instructed. "Once you get into your stride, the stress melts away."

McFadden encouraged the kids – they range from sixth to 12th grade – to wander, not clump up in a pack, adding in jest that they'd only lost one student in the forest before.

"We buried her a few hours ago," he joked, eliciting a few giggles. Tough crowd. About what you might expect with teenagers.

He then turned the pack loose to ramble through the woods for a couple of hours before they toasted

hotdogs and s'mores over an open fire and played yard games. Then buses came to return them to their concrete-filled city lives.

Saturday, McFadden will do it all again.

In fact, he takes a group of urban youth on an outdoor adventure every Saturday, all school year long, with his Outdoor Adventure Club of Greater Cincinnati.

In September they paddled kayaks down the Little Miami River, where some kids needed reassurance that crocodiles did not lurk below the surface.

In October, there was mountain biking. In December, slip-sliding on an ice rink. In January, indoor rock climbing. In February, skiing.

Hiking came and went in March and, this month, they're doing a 40-mile bike ride on the Little Miami bike trail.

The majority of these kids had never done any of it before.

For the kids, it's all free. The activity, lunch and transportation are

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Denny McFadden is program director of the Outdoor Adventure Club.

**"The best part is it was self-started. Denny McFadden just knew this was an issue and decided to do something about it."**

BETSY TOWNSEND,  
co-founder of Leave No Child Inside –  
Greater Cincinnati

## Mason H.S. Muslim event canceled

Principal apologizes, says it was to combat biases

Hannah Sparling

hsparling@enquirer.com

and Michael D. Clark

mclark@enquirer.com

**MASON** — It was pitched as an event that would "celebrate diversity" – students would wear a headscarf for a day to get a taste of Islamic culture.

It backfired.

Mason High School canceled "A Covered Girl Challenge," and principal Mindy McCarty-Stewart sent an apology this week to district families.

The event was meant to combat stereotypes students may face when wearing head coverings, McCarty-Stewart wrote, but "as the event spread beyond our school community, however, we received many strong messages that made me reconsider the event's ability to meet its objectives."

The Covered Girl Challenge was initially scheduled April 23.

Female students who wanted to participate would wear a headscarf, or hijab, for the entire school day.

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## MAJOR CLOSURE ON I-71 THIS WEEKEND

Traffic could be nightmarish this weekend as construction work will force part of Interstate 71 to be shut-down. Here's what you need to know:

The 4-mile stretch of northbound I-71 between the Reading Road and Dana Avenue exits will be completely shut down all weekend, beginning at 10 p.m. Friday through 6 a.m. Monday.

The highway will be closed as crews tear down an old railroad bridge near the Martin Luther King Jr. Drive overpass, according to the Ohio Department of Transportation. Motorists will be detoured to northbound I-75 to eastbound Ohio 562 (Norwood Lateral) to northbound I-71.

Check Cincinnati.com and download The Enquirer's iPhone traffic app for updates.

Jason Williams

## COVER STORY

## Club's purpose a global trend

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covered by grants and donations from local and national foundations and businesses.

This is a decidedly local endeavor, but the Outdoor Adventure Club is playing a small role in a big international movement to reconnect young people with nature.

Young people, we know, are spending less time outdoors these days, engrossed in the spread of technology and an increasingly sedentary human lifestyle. New research shows that the increasing divide between children and the natural world has dangerous repercussions. Reconnecting young minds and bodies to the outdoors also creates some surprising benefits: higher test scores, better mental health, even reduction of some attention-deficit symptoms.

Here in Cincinnati, McFadden is aware of the statistics. But he's more intimately familiar with the joy and confidence he sees bubble up in the students.

Something must be working because participation in the program has skyrocketed, growing from 505 participants from three schools three years ago to this year's group numbering around 2,200 students from 13 schools, including Newport middle and high schools.

Next year the club will expand to students in Covington, Bellevue, Dayton, and Ludlow in Northern Kentucky as well as the remaining Cincinnati Public high schools.

### No child left indoors

Before Richard Louv published his popular book "Last Child in the Woods," his 10-year-old son asked him a simple question: "Dad, how come it was more fun when you were a kid?"

Louv asked what he meant.

"Well, you're always talking about your woods and tree houses, and how you used to ride that horse down near the swamp."

His young son had a point and it got Louv thinking. Then researching. Then writing the book, which was first published a decade ago and crystallizes the issue of a society that Louv said "is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature."

The most recent statistics are alarming:

» Roughly 59 percent of 41,000 American children and young adults surveyed in 2009 said they had participated in at least one outdoor activity in all of 2008. That means 41 percent had not. As for black survey participants, only 7.4 percent reported purposefully doing something in nature that year, according to findings by The Outdoor Foundation.

» Participation in outdoor activities had declined in all age groups since a similar study was done in 2006.

» In 2004, children spent an average of 6.21 hours with media daily. In 2009, that number increased to an average of 7.38 hours a day, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Today, many studies show that this



THE ENQUIRER/  
MEG VOGEL

Outdoor Adventure Club members on a 5-mile hike at the Cincinnati Nature Center on March 21. Some pediatricians are giving their patients and their parents a prescription to visit a park or other natural space.

media overexposure can be linked to visual problems, obesity and a host of other maladies.

» The lack of contact with nature also has been shown to affect a child's understanding of the world around them. A 2009 study by Airbus surveyed 1,500 children in the United Kingdom between the ages of 5-10. Forty percent couldn't tell the difference between a wasp and a bee.

Before Louv's book, "there wasn't a national conversation on this," he said by phone at his home in California. "What happened is it became a national conversation to my surprise."

And it's now an international one. A series of longitudinal studies in the United States, Australia and England and other developed nations are beginning to show that exposure to nature has positive effects on math and science proficiency, eating behaviors and whether kids care or not to protect the planet.

Since Louv's book was first published in 2005, the Children and Nature Network has formed. It now has 120 local chapters, including Leave No Child Inside - Greater Cincinnati, co-founded by Betsy Townsend and Bill Hopple, an organization which doesn't do direct programming but points people to existing programs, like the Outdoor Adventure Club.

"(The club) is a great example of how we can address some of the barriers that prevent kids from accessing the outdoors in today's world," Townsend said. "It addresses safety issues, transportation issues and kids not having nature in their own neighborhoods."

"The best part is it was self-started," Townsend said. "Denny McFadden just knew this was an issue and decided to do something about it."

### Every child in a park

Louv likes to believe the movement is at a tipping point: where local groups are taking up the challenge.

Clubs like McFadden's and the Nature Families Network, which encourages groups of families to create their own clubs and get outside together, are some of those indicators.

Some pediatricians are now prescribing nature, literally, by giving

their patients and their parents a prescription to visit a park or other natural space. Nature preschools, licensed programs that use a natural area for most student activities, are now a thing.

There's also President Barack Obama's newly announced Every Child in a Park initiative, which starts in September.

"In September, every 4th grader in the U.S. will get a free pass along with their family to go as many times as they want (to the national parks) for a whole year," Louv said. "It's a great goal. If we keep this going for 12 years, if we reach most 4th graders, that means a whole generation will have gotten an experience outdoors that many would not have gotten."

Other state and local park systems will be encouraged to open their doors, too, Louv said.

And that could prepare them for clubs like the Outdoor Adventure Club, which has been supported by Green Umbrella, Activities Beyond the Classroom and is now a program of the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati.

What it can inspire is almost boundless.

On that March day at the Cincinnati Nature Center, Joe Sheffel, a 7th grader at Newport Middle School, considered his surroundings. With his thumbs curled under the straps of his Outdoor Adventure Club backpack, he said he doesn't enjoy being in nature because it is beautiful.

"I go to think about the evolutionary process," said the young man who just scored a very nice 21 on the science portion of the ACT. "Why a bird's feathers are pink or blue. Why humans never evolved into trees."

His brother, Jimmy, a 6th grader, goes for the adventure, said their mother Melissa Sheffel, who is on the Newport School Board. She said she has come to really appreciate the program for her kids and others.

"We literally have kids that have never left the county, let alone go to Loveland and rent a canoe," Sheffel said. "Frankly, if there was a cost, the numbers would drop dramatically. It allows us to educate them outside the classroom."

McFadden said none of what he does would be possible without donations from dozens of businesses, help

## CLUB NEEDS YOUR HELP

Club participation has exploded and organizers are in a pickle. At the beginning of the school year, the middle- and high- school participants were told that if they attend half of the monthly adventures, they would be rewarded with a weekend of camping at Miami Whitewater Forest, and they'd be given a tent and two sleeping bags. Roughly 300 teenagers qualify for this reward, but Outdoor Adventure Club can currently only afford to take about 100 students. They are short about \$8,800, a figure that must be raised by April 28. To make a donation, visit [www.outdooradventureclubs.org](http://www.outdooradventureclubs.org) and click on the "Donate" button.

The teenagers involved also need gear. Some of the teens show up without gloves, hats or wear their only pair of shoes. To help, GEAR UP & GIVE is now running at REI, Roads Rivers and Trails and Benchmark Outfitters. Donate gently used outdoor clothing and gear and you'll get a discount from the store.

### WHAT IF MY KID'S SCHOOL DOESN'T OFFER THE OUTDOOR CLUB?

Leave No Child Inside - Cincinnati is a chapter of the Children & Nature Network and provides a variety of ways for families and schools to participate in the international movement to get kids outdoors more. Visit the website, [www.lncigc.org](http://www.lncigc.org), for more information or call 513-965-4899.

from club advisers at all the schools and sizable grants from Interact for Health, the Haile/US Bank Foundation and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

"Watching these kids shine - where they hadn't had the opportunity before - has been very inspiring," McFadden said. "And accepting the very idea that if you can accomplish this very challenging skill - something you may be fearful of - if you can gain the confidence, how many other challenges can you overcome in the everyday world?"