The new EEC Volunteer Newsletter

In order to serve our volunteers better, the EEC is trying a newsletter format for our volunteer updates. In addition to our list of upcoming volunteer opportunities it will include brief updates from the EEC to keep you in the loop! Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at the EEC so let us know what you think – your thoughts matter!

Volunteer of the Year!

Congratulations to Samantha Crooks and Victoria Gamez!

Samantha ‘Sam’ Crooks and Victoria ‘Tori’ Gamez are sisters in Big Brothers Big Sisters of Elkhart County and together they have been volunteering at the Elkhart Environmental Center since 2012. This year alone, the pair gave over 45 hours of service with the EEC at Middlebury Riverfest, EnviroFest, and the River Cleanup. Sam also serves on the EnviroFest Planning Committee; coordinating the raffle and silent auction. Tori and Sam are engaged, enthusiastic, and always have fun! They are pictured here at the 2013 River Cleanup with a message in a bottle that they found while pulling trash out of the river!

The Volunteer of the Year award is presented to an EEC volunteer at the annual Appreciation Dinner. Recipient(s) are selected based on service hours, breadth of participation, and willingness to take initiative and go above and beyond as an EEC volunteer.
Specialized Skills

The EEC is seeking the following specialized skills. Please contact Ericka at (574) 293-5070 to find out how you can help!

- Communications/newsletter
- Landscaping/horticulture
- Event planning/management
- Edible/small space gardening

Invasive Species Removal (year-round)
Volunteers are needed to eradicate invasive plants competing with native vegetation. Training provided.

Adopt-a-Spot at the EEC (year-round)
We are looking for individuals who love being outdoors to adopt areas of the EEC. Volunteers adopt educational and/or natural areas and remove weeds, invasive species, litter and perform other maintenance tasks as needed.

Gardens & Trails

Adopt-a-Trail (year-round)
Nature lovers are invited to help care for trails at Boot Lake Nature Preserve and the EEC. Volunteers keep trails clear of trash and debris.

Trail Improvement
Help maintain the hiking trails at the EEC. Spread wood chips, trim overgrowth and ensure trails are in good condition. Equipment and training provided.

Volunteer Farmer (March – November)
Will work for...fresh veggies? Then help with the food education garden! Volunteers plant seeds, weed, water and harvest. There are spring, summer, and fall harvests. No farm/garden experience necessary and you can take home some of the harvest to enjoy!

Garden Projects (March through November)
Spend time weeding, and enhancing gardens at the environmental center. There are several gardens to choose from and we have everything you need to get started!

Education, Outreach, & Events

Middlebury Riverfest
Saturday, August 16  9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Volunteers are needed at the EEC booth for Middlebury Riverfest (Riverbend Park, Middlebury). Volunteers will set up the booth, share information about the EEC, and lead a kid’s gardening activity.

Elkhart River Clean-Up
Saturday, September 13  9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Volunteers will be on land and in canoes cleaning up the Elkhart River. Volunteers meet at the EEC. Morning refreshments will be provided. Bring a water bottle and dress for the weather. Participants may bring canoes, gloves, waders, life jackets, etc. Shuttle transportation provided.

ElkhartWood Tree Planting in October
Date(s) TBD
The EEC will participate in NeighborWoods month this October and help make Elkhart a greener community! Volunteers are needed for a community tree planting event. Stay tuned for detailed information to be released this fall. This event is part of national NeighborWoods Month.

Land & Habitat Management

Reflection Grove  (spring through fall)
This outdoor education area is a beautiful spot to reflect on our environment and the challenges we face. Help is needed to weed, trim overgrowth, etc. Great group project!

Group Volunteer Opportunities

Is your company, organization or club interested in volunteering as a group and giving back to the community? Call Ericka Popovich, Volunteer Coordinator, to set up a project at (574) 293-5070 or send an email to ericka.popovich@coei.org.
A Recipe for Volunteers

There were lots of tasty dishes at the Volunteer Appreciation Luau this year and lots of recipe requests! If you brought a dish this year and are willing to share your recipe, please email Ericka at ericka.popovich@coei.org. We would like to compile them for all our volunteers to enjoy. Yum!

Mango Pineapple Salsa

1 mango, diced
1-1½ cups diced fresh pineapple
½ of one red bell pepper, diced small
¼ cup red onion, finely diced
1 tbsp. minced fresh cilantro
Juice of one lime
Pinch of coarse salt

To make the salsa, combine all the ingredients in a medium bowl. Toss to mix well. Cover and refrigerate, allowing flavors to blend.