



**OTF GROW GRANT
Testimonials**

INTERVIEWS – VOLUNTEERS

Heartland connects science and community with great ideas, great work. Raising awareness and environmental education is key to protecting, sustaining nature ... and us! Great job Heartland! *Student and Volunteer*

I was mostly involved in the education portion. I believe that during the education trips we are able to showcase all of the amazing things we are doing to students and teachers, including taking them through the boardwalk and showing them our new bat maternity roost. We engaged the locals in the restoration and conservation of our forest, and many of the students we see return with stories of how they are making a difference like planting a garden or helping turtles cross the road.

Ontario Certified Teacher and Volunteer

Education is the key to people learning how best to treat our environment. I would love to see more community workshops on planting, composting or initiatives like selling native plants to prevent invasive species. Terrific to see all the work that has been done over the last three years thanks to Ontario Trillium Foundation funding. There has been so much GROWTH! *Retired Teacher and Volunteer*

The staff at Heartland are constantly growing and surrounding the establishment with new amazing volunteers. Everyone is dedicated to making this area a better place for all those in the environment, I have never seen a group of people as hardworking and caring as those that work at Heartland Forest.” *Community Volunteer*

We are so happy to see all the growth that has occurred at Heartland Forest over the past three years. I think our biggest challenge is getting people to care about making a difference and educating them that even a small change can make an impact in the long run. *Educational Assistant and Volunteer*

Being part of the amazing contributions at Heartland Forest has provided me perspective of our impact on the environment. Heartland Forest hosts fun, interactive and educational learning experiences that are unique to their organization. As a volunteer, I was provided with hands-on opportunities to educate visitors on the natural features and trails in the Niagara Region.

Niagara College Teacher and Volunteer

Quote – Visiting School

I just want to thank you so very much for a wonderful day! Our students had a fantastic time! I want to let you know our guide Owen did a superb job as a guide! He was welcoming, presented his information clearly, at a pace our students could follow and engage, he was respectful and so helpful. This was an excellent experience all the way around!!!!

Sharron Phillips, Special Education Teacher, Notre Dame College School



INTERVIEWS – STAFF

2018/2019 Summer Camp Staff

“I have been working at Heartland Forest for 2 summers now, and the amount of change I have seen in only a year is astounding. Our new Board Walk and Outback Program Area gives our summer campers great spaces to explore as they are encapsulated by the canopy of the beautiful surrounding forest.”



Julia Heximer
Summer Camp Group Leader

My Wonderful Teaching Experience at Heartland Forest

In 2017/2018 I had had the opportunity to work at Heartland Forest, preparing and teaching a broad spectrum of topics related to nature and the environment. These outdoor nature lessons were then delivered to a public audience of all ages and abilities, most frequently being school aged children.

Since Heartland Forest consists mainly of natural forests, wetlands and wet meadows, the focus of the nature lessons was on the rich diversity of flora and fauna found locally. Using my degree in fine arts and my background as a naturalist and in teaching, I incorporated these skills to create and lead fact-based discussions, raise questions concerning current issues and awareness, create games and teaching aids, and serve as a guide in exploring the meadows, wetlands and forests.

One of my many memorable experiences was in the creation of larger than life three dimensional frogs, tadpoles and various life cycle stages. These were placed in a diorama which was used to teach school children about the many fascinating facts of the life of frogs during the months of “Frog Fest” at Heartland. I was always delighted by the children’s positive and engaged reaction to the paper mâché frog and tadpoles, often asking if they were real!

Another favourite activity, again from the overwhelmingly positive response of the children, was being able to show living specimens found right at Heartland Forest, and incorporating them into the lesson. I have no doubt that the interaction with living things helped make the lessons memorable, and that both children and adults found a new appreciation for that organism.

Delivering the factual information about identifying what is in nature, as well as the correct way to interact with nature, and a deep appreciation for all living things, was at the heart of all my teaching experiences at Heartland. I believe it is in fact what the Heartland “nature experience” is all about!

Joanna Paul
Program Lead

PARTNER LETTER

Nadine Litwin (Christmas Bird Count & Bird Surveys)

As a Field Ornithologist, I study birds, including their physiology, classification, ecology and behaviour. I have been actively involved at Heartland Forest for the last three years, providing project input, seasonal bird and amphibian surveys as well as leading the annual Christmas Bird Count which is a free event for the community.

The Heartland Forest Wet Meadow Pollination Trail meanders through a large, wide-swathed field that acts as a natural connection between the recent wetland restoration – which in turn connects with the high-quality slough forest to the north-northwest – and the east-west Welland River corridor. The combination of size and connectivity of the trail system stands to contribute significantly to genetic, species, and ecosystem biodiversity in the Niagara region.

Currently, the pollinator trail is host to two barn swallow structures and a significant number of nesting boxes as well as native bee boxes. The restored wetland houses the only bat maternity roost in Canada.

What I appreciate about Heartland Forest is the way that they connect science and community. The best way to protect biodiversity is through education and engagement, and Heartland Forest is excellent at both.

Whether it's to stop by to listen to amphibians or to check out the pollination field, or to participate in a Christmas Bird Count, Heartland Forest makes nature experiences accessible to all. Great ideas, great projects, a gem in Niagara!

Nadine Litwin MEd., G.Sc., GCER,
ARCT

Fort Erie, Ontario
289-929-0097

nlitwin82@gmail.com



PARTNER LETTER

Paul Philp (Dragonfly Monitoring Partner)

I have been involved with a variety of environmental initiatives over the years. They include leading outings for local nature clubs and organizations, teaching environmental courses at Niagara College, founding and being an active participant for the Niagara Envirothon, and working with Ontario Nature and other organizations on their environmental programs.

From my experience, Heartland Forest is the place of choice in the Niagara Region for environmental education. There is no other place that is so well suited. It is a significant environmentally protected area hosting both woodland and wetland flora and fauna for all to enjoy and learn about. It hosts facilities and trails that are accessible to people with mobility challenges which allow young, challenged, and elderly people and their families to all enjoy. There is educational signage and learning centers throughout, and much of this is accomplished with the help of volunteers.

The nature centre and the new facilities and trails that have been constructed have brought this site to a whole new level. Heartland Forest is easily accessed from all cities and town in the Niagara Region because of its central location. This is important when one considers programming. And good programming is what will help people understand and appreciate the natural aspects of “The Forest” and their own lives.

The first Dragonfly Watch community event was conducted on September 11, 2016. Four species of dragonflies and four species of damselflies were recorded. The Green darner dragonfly, one of the 5 species that are known to migrate to the southern United States was observed. My recommendation at the time was to have 2 or 3 counts at different times in the season. This has been implemented over the remaining years of the grant which has proved beneficial.

If you would like any further information, feel free to contact me.

Enjoy and preserve nature,

Paul Philp
Environmental Educator and Consultant
p.k.philp@gmail.com
(905) 894-2723

