



Friends
OF THE HORMEL
NATURE CENTER



2025

ANNUAL
REPORT



LOOK BACK
ON 2025

PEEK AT A
FUTURE NATURE
PLAYSCAPE

BECOME A
FRIENDS
MEMBER



OUR MISSION

To enhance and encourage environmental education, scientific opportunities, and the enjoyment of nature at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

What is the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center? For that matter, what is a Nature Center?

In my first year as President of the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center's board of directors, I have thought about that quite a bit. To be sure, there is the dictionary definition. A "Nature Center" is a facility dedicated to educating the public about nature, wildlife and environmental conservation.

In preparing to lead the Friends board, I talked with many people to find out their feelings about the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. Nearly every one of those conversations worked its way around to emotions and/or memories. *"It's my place of solace."* *"It's where I took my spouse on our first date."* *"It's where our kids tasted real maple syrup for the first time."* *"It's where we go for the Halloween Warm-Up."*

I guess what I discovered is that the Nature Center means something a little different to everybody. As the Friends Board president, I want you all to know that I – along with each board member – take very seriously the responsibility of representing each of you and your wants and desires for what the Nature Center is and could be.

Numerous exciting projects have been recently completed or are in the works at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. This includes the paving of a section of the trails to provide better access to all; efforts to offer more social events for Friends members; and designing and fundraising for a nature playscape to encourage more outdoor play.

So back to the original question: What is the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center? It is a place for everyone to come and enjoy the outdoors, relax learn something new, take in a performance, exercise, and explore.

I would love to hear from you. What would you like to see at the Nature Center? More programs? Different classes? In a perfect world, what can the Nature Center be and do for you? Feel free to email your ideas to me at jschrame@yahoo.com. Thank you for being a supporter and for your consideration in becoming a member of the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center.



John Schramek
President, Friends of the Hormel Nature Center
jschrame@yahoo.com

2025 BY THE NUMBERS



924
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

999 HOURS
FROM 22 MENTEES



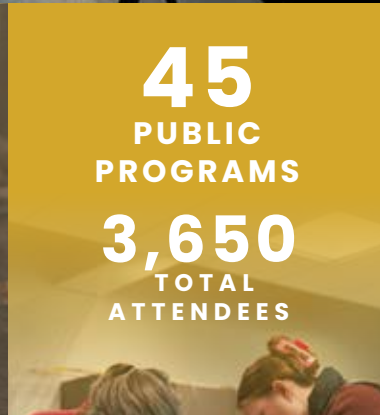
10 ASTRONOMY
NIGHTS
289 TOTAL
PARTICIPANTS



5,917 STUDENTS
FROM 22 SCHOOL DISTRICTS,
4 PRESCHOOL CENTERS AND
2 4-H GROUPS



47
SUMMER
CLASSES
396
LEARNERS



45
PUBLIC
PROGRAMS
3,650
TOTAL
ATTENDEES



410
CANOERS +
KAYAKERS



277
POUNDS
OF HONEY



110
TRACK CHAIR
RENTALS



116
TRAIL
ACCESS
VEHICLE
RIDES



1.4 MILES
OF TRAIL PAVED +
0.2 MILES REPAVED



REMOVAL OF
475
DEAD TREES



136
BOTTLES
OF SYRUP

Thank You

The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center would not be the regional treasure it is without the support of many who have made generous donations, volunteered and become Friends members.

Thank you for your continued support!



FUNDING FOR EDUCATION PROGRAMMING FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE AUSTIN IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND.



FUNDING FOR OUR RECENT TRAIL PAVING PROJECT WAS MADE POSSIBLE WITH A LEGACY AMENDMENT GRANT FROM THE GREATER MN REGIONAL PARKS & TRAILS COMMISSION.



LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING IS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM THE HORMEL FOUNDATION ANNUALLY.



Nature
Playscape

EXPLORE • CONNECT • DISCOVER

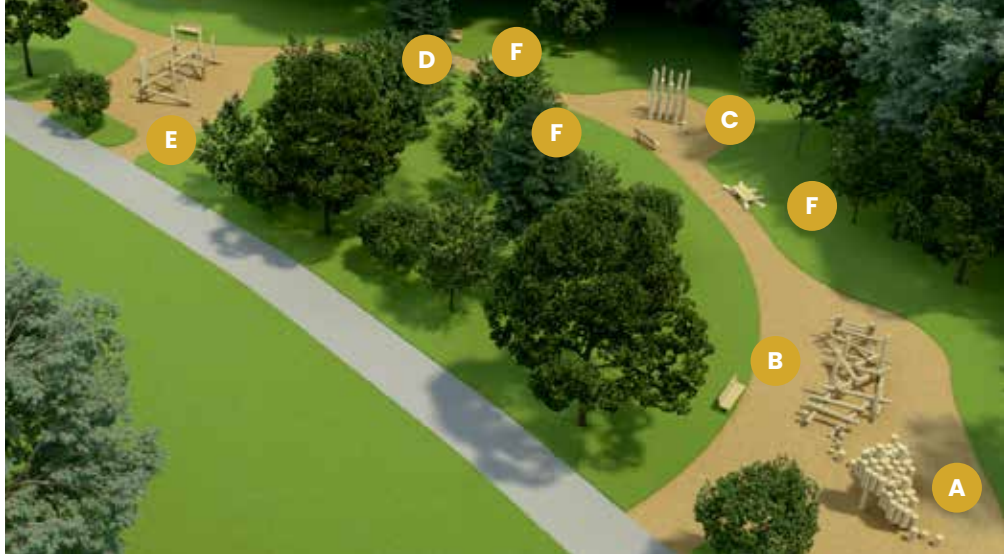
Nestled into the woods overlooking Dobbins Creek’s north branch, the future Nature Playscape will offer an exciting destination for children and families to discover, explore and connect at Austin’s Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

In 2026, the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center is committing \$200,000 to build the Nature Playscape about a half mile from the Nature Center’s parking lot along the Black Trail across from a restored native prairie on the way to the observation tower. More financial support is needed to make the Nature Playscape a reality. The Friends hopes to raise at least \$190,000 to fully fund the project targeted for construction in late-2026.

Modeled after similar nature-play facilities, including one in Rochester, the project’s cost is driven by the need for play features that are safe yet fun, age appropriate and created from materials that are durable to ensure many years of free enjoyment by the public.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, when children play and learn in nature, research indicates that they do so with more vigor, engagement, imagination and cooperation than in wholly artificial environments. Symptoms also are reduced for attention deficit and depression. Experts agree that children need access to nature the same way they need good nutrition and adequate sleep.

Investing in our community through projects like the Nature Playscape enriches the lives of our community members and visitors. It also keeps Austin a great place for children and families to explore, connect and discover. We invite you to get involved by attending upcoming events and consider contributing to this exciting project.



MAP KEY

- A: WOOD MOUNTAIN
- B: TIMBER STACKS LONGVIEW
- C: NOTCHED POSTS + STEPPERS
- D: TIMBER STACKS SALEM
- E: GIANT ROPE SWING
- F: DISCOVERY TABLE



PRELIMINARY RENDERINGS & PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIDWEST PLAYSAPES



PROJECT AT A GLANCE

ESTIMATED TOTAL: **\$470,000**

FRIENDS OF THE HORMEL NATURE CENTER CONTRIBUTION: **\$200,000**

CITY OF AUSTIN IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION: **\$80,000**

MAINTENANCE FUND: **\$25,000**

COMMUNITY SUPPORT NEEDED: **\$190,000**

ANY FUNDS RAISED IN EXCESS WILL BE PLACED INTO A DEDICATED NATURE PLAYSAPPE FUND FOR ONGOING MAINTENANCE AND/OR FUTURE NATURE PLAYSAPPE EXPANSION PROJECTS.



<< LEARN MORE
Scan the QR code for more details and to support our project!

For the wild ones and the little ones.

BECOME A FRIEND



Friends memberships are integral to the success and programming available at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. You can be part of our ongoing support by becoming a Friends member or gifting a membership today!

The Friends truly enhance the work being done at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. In addition to direct support for programs and projects, financial support to the Friends from memberships and other donations has been used as a match for grants to the Nature Center. For example, in 2025 the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center paved 1.6 miles of trails with State of MN Legacy Funding awarded by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission. The Friends provided the 20% match on the project. For these kinds of grant-funded projects, your donations are being multiplied 2, 5, or 10 times.



Membership Benefits

- Play a role in supporting and promoting environmental education programs.
- \$5 off all Summer Adventure programs.
- Discounts on all Nature Center merchandise.
- Coupon codes for free admission to specific family classes.
- Friends annual bus day-trip
- One-year gift membership to give to a non-member of Friends.
- Invitation to the Friends' annual meeting in January.
- Free, mailed copy of the Nature Center's Summer Activity Guide.



<< LEARN MORE

Scan the QR code or visit the link below to donate or sign up for membership.

HORMELNATURECENTER.ORG/FRIENDS

Membership Levels

WATER	Supporter	\$50
PRAIRIE	Contributor	\$100
FOREST	Patron	\$500
NIGHT SKY*	Lifetime	\$1,000

*Lifetime memberships never expire. A portion of each lifetime membership supports youth scholarships for Nature Center programs.



"The secret to the success of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center is the strong community support! Becoming a Friends member is a great way to show your support."

Luke Reese
Director, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center



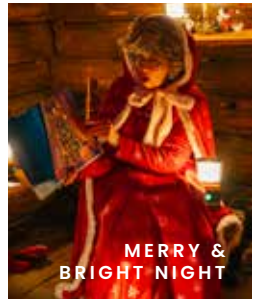
YOUTH MENTORSHIP



TRAIL PAVING



TRACK CHAIRS



MERRY & BRIGHT NIGHT



8K RUN



DAMMEN FAMILY FUN DAY

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE FRIENDS

- Trail paving 20% match – \$66,000
- Three Action Track chairs to improve accessibility – \$40,000
- Starlab inflatable planetarium and technology – \$46,000
- Trail vehicle/groomer – \$52,600
- Native mussels exhibit – \$143,200
- One-year intern – \$40,000 per year
- Outdoor, mobile pizza oven for public events
- App-based outdoor survival game
- Senior citizen specials
- Nature-play events & programs
- Youth mentorship program
- Youth scholarships for summer classes
- Busing grants for the public

ANNUAL EVENTS BY THE FRIENDS

- Dammen Family Fun Day (July)
- 8K Run (Sept/Oct)
- Halloween Warm-Up (Oct)
- Merry & Bright Night (Dec)

TESTIMONIALS

"JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER IS TRULY A VALUABLE ASSET TO AUSTIN AND MOWER COUNTY AND AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE. WE DONATED TO HELP PURCHASE TWO TRACKCHAIRS SO EVERYONE CAN ACCESS THE CENTER'S BEAUTIFUL GROUNDS. WE HELPED PURCHASE THE INDOOR PLANETARIUM SO STUDENTS AND OTHERS COULD LEARN ABOUT THE SOLAR SYSTEM."

PAUL & JOANNE WORLEIN
Major Donors to the Friends

"Our family became lifetime members for many reasons but the primary being the Nature Center is just a magical place for our community. We enjoyed it growing up, and our children love it out there. It's a place of wonder for exploration, relaxation and fitness alike!"

The Bartholomew Family
Founders of Nord/Haus Real Estate Group



"The Eagles are proud supporters of the Friends, driven by a shared belief that nature should be accessible, educational and inspiring for everyone. Our donations reflect a deep commitment to equity in access; youth education; community trails; and outdoor exploration."

Jackie Carr
Austin Eagles, Lookout Aerie 703



Friends of the Hormel Nature Center
 1304 21st St. NE
 Austin, MN 55912



BOARD OF DIRECTORS



John Schramek



Jennifer Davis



Jill Andrews



David Wagner



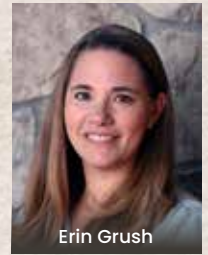
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Elizabeth Leyk



Erin Mecklenburg



Jamaal Gibson



Tony Mallory

STAFF LEADERSHIP TEAM



Luke Reese



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Meredith Maloney



HORMELNATURECENTER.ORG

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