



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by
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SILENCE REIGNS FOR NOW AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

It was almost eerily quiet last Monday after a summer filled with the sounds of high-spirited children enjoying farm camp at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road. The 3-5 years old campers and their parents closed out the summer season, as some schools opened this week. Stratford's mission revolves around young people, and the change in atmosphere was immediately apparent. By Tuesday with the influx of farmhands, gardeners, and the Herb Group the spell was broken. Preparations started for the 5th Grade Science Program "Messages from the Earth" beginning the Tuesday after Labor Day, and a giant clean out of the machine shed storage room before the farm and nature tours begin in mid-September.

Our long anticipated annual fund-raiser Enchanted Evening was held for the second time at the Columbus Zoo Africa Event Center on August 9. The weather was perfect for the 300 guests who enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, drinks and a photo op on the deck overlooking the Savanna and the handsome reticulated giraffes, before a buffet dinner, presentations and auction. New this year was an online auction which included a hand-crafted wooden bar and stools, and a pine slab top coffee table. It proved very successful, and a lot easier than transporting big items to the Zoo!

John Switzer, Stratford Board Trustee and retired Columbus Dispatch writer, was honored with the first Stratford Board Fellow award. John sat on a stump as he shared the importance of Stratford in helping kids understand farm life and how their food is grown.

Executive Director and Farmer Dr. Jeff Dickinson thanked everyone for their donations to the solar campaign initiated at last year's Enchanted Evening. The panels have been producing for three months and the results are even better than anticipated. Farmer Jeff continued by showing and narrating a video titled "Celebrating Everything Under the Sun." It was indeed a celebration as the beauty of the working farm shone through the camera lens.

My "Farm Connection" articles have been published in the Delaware Gazette for the last ten years, and it was a pleasure to attend the recent preview of "Newspapers in Delaware County" at the Delaware Historical Society Meeker House on Stratford Road and tour the home. I saw the portrait of Judge Hosea Williams, which used to hang at Stratford, presiding over the fireplace in the parlor. Judge Williams and his family moved to Ohio in 1817 and they were one of the early settlers and founding fathers of the Delaware community known as Stratford. The Judge is special because he is the great, great, great grandfather of Gale Warner, whose idea it was to create Stratford Ecological Center.

The interesting exhibit created by Curator Benny Shoults and open every Sunday from 2-5 pm. until December, celebrates and spans the 200 years history of the Delaware Gazette and other local papers. A time-line shows how the paper started as the Delaware Gazette, underwent many name changes and owners, the longest the Thompson family from 1836 until 2004, and yet continues to be called the Delaware Gazette today.

Meanwhile, back on the farm two mounded piles of manure appeared in the barn yard but will not remain there. Our ancient muck spreader broke and a new large-capacity spreader is scheduled for delivery after the September 18-20 Farm Science Review from Parrott's, the John Deere dealership. Farmer Jeff used the fore-end loader to clean out the pens and deposited the load in the yard to avoid numerous trips to the North Pasture.

It was certainly necessary to clean out the pig pen as five piglets arrived on August 7. Donna our sow failed to conceive this year and we have been piglet-free for too long. They were weaned at 5 weeks, so they are not very big. Three are a rich brown like the Tamworth breed, and two are much darker. Sometimes you need to look hard to find them as they bury under the straw, and as usual they are more fun to watch than most tv programs.

The last of the arborvitae on the orchard perimeter came down when we realized it would be too difficult to erect the new fence around them. Time will tell whether the protection we thought they provided for the apple trees has been lost. The bluebirds will benefit from the absence of habitat for the sparrows, who often take over their nesting boxes.

The big greenhouse cover has been removed due to tears in the roof. It will be replaced by late September to protect the more tender crops like peppers. In the interim the sunshine should help clear up some mold, eliminate the whitefly problem, and freshen up the exposed soil.

Without the fence the deer are taking advantage of the exposed apple crop and even enter the greenhouse to sample the vegetables. When Farmer Jeff and dog Buddy close the chicken coop at dusk, Buddy loves to chase the deer away. But Buddy is too friendly to chase any humans, so feel free to come out to enjoy the cooler temperatures and a quieter environment, at least for a few weeks.

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