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NOAA Grant to Promote Hazard Mitigation Awareness

Tucked away in a three-story former movie theater building on Easton's Northampton Street, the Nurture Nature Center will never be confused with Philadelphia's Franklin Institute or Washington D.C.'s National Air and Space Museum.

But then, those internationally renowned science centers haven't been asked to help save the planet by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The Nurture Nature Center has received a \$459,420 NOAA grant to conduct a four-year program, titled Create Resilience, to develop partnerships with students, raise awareness to the effects of climate change and promote the *Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan*.

Nurture Nature is one of nine grantees among 237 applicants from across the country, along with such centers as Boston's Museum of Science in Boston, San Diego's Ocean Discovery Institute and the University of Michigan.

It's the second NOAA grant received by Nurture Nature, which also was awarded a \$241,274 grant in 2010 for its Science on a Sphere program that focuses on climate change and flooding.

"We don't usually give a second grant to an applicant, but Nurture Nature has delivered such a high quality return on the first grant," said Louisa Koch, NOAA's Director of Education. "They are small, but they're mighty."

The Environmental Literacy Grants were awarded to centers with proposals to work with students K-12 and expert planners to create community-based resilience plans. Specifically, Nurture Nature launched a four-year program in the Bangor, Easton and Wilson area school districts that raises climate change awareness and educates the community on the Hazard Mitigation plan updated by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, in partnership with Lehigh and Northampton counties.

The current Hazard Mitigation Plan includes 1,161 actions designed to prepare the region for disaster, such as relocating homes from the flood plain, outfitting municipalities with emergency generators to keep essential services powered during utility interruptions or providing education to reduce drug overdose deaths.

"The hope is that when we're done, there is an understanding that hazard resilience is important and should be a part of everyday life in every community in the Lehigh Valley," said Rachel Hogan Carr, Nurture Nature Executive Director. "The overall goal is to contribute to a global conversation on climate change."

Nurture Nature was chosen, in part, because much of its focus rests with climate change and flooding risks – a role it was founded in 2007 to take on, after the region suffered damaging floods in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Nurture Nature kicked off its Create Resilience program in February with three public meetings. This year's activities will continue by gathering stories from families who have been affected by disaster and through working with students to document mitigation actions being taken. Years two and three of the program are scheduled to include educating the community on mitigation strategies, circulating a printed resiliency guide and creating three portable resiliency-themed murals designed to encourage feedback about community priorities.

Year four of the program is to include a short film about the Create Resilience program that would be shown at 150 science centers around the world.

"So, we'll be famous," Hogan Carr joked.

Ideally, the lessons learned will extend well after the grant money and program run out in 2022.

"The stakes only get higher as our population rises and the effects of climate change increase," Hogan Carr said. "Every projection shows that we can expect more extreme weather and more flooding. We need to start taking this seriously."

Part of that effort is spreading the message to a generation of students who will be dealing with the effects for decades to come. Patrick Painter is an Easton Area High School Senior who is serving as a Student Ambassador for the project. Next fall he'll be a meteorology major at the University of Oklahoma, but he's spending the next few months doing interviews and gathering stories of people who have been affected by disasters that range from the flood of 1955 to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Though he's graduating next month, he plans to work through the summer so the exhibit can be unveiled in September.

"It's an important message to spread because extreme weather, disaster and climate change effect everyone everywhere," Painter said. "We will all have to think about how we will deal with this."

Anyone looking to get involved can visit nurturenature.org to take a survey on the project, and Easton, Wilson and Bangor area high school students can apply this fall to be Resilience Youth Ambassadors.

The *Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan* can be found at lvpc.org.