WEDNESDAYS AT WOE



The mini science camp at Oconee Nuclear Station's World of Energy attracted nearly 200 children and parents.



Wednesdays at WOE started off with a lesson in boating and water safet complete with lifejacket fittings.

PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Aided by Randy Miller, better known as the Critter Keeper, 7-year-old Cody Teague holds a tarantula during a presentation at the World of Energy.

BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Snakes, spiders, lizards and other creepy-crawly animals invaded the auditorium at Duke's World of Energy last week. No need to be alarmed — they were there with the Critter Keeper as part of WOE's educational summer programming.

Wednesdays at WOE, a new initiative at the visitors center, has been drawing families for a mid-week break to get out of the house and mix up summer routines since June 18.

"We wanted to try to make it educational," said communications consultant Amanda Dow. "We wanted to try to keep that focus in as much of our activities as we could."

After researching, brainstorming and making phone calls across the Upstate, the WOE team created a list of events to keep young minds stimulated during summer break.

The program, free for children 12 and under, kicked off with a lesson in water and boating safety — important for an area surrounded by lakes and rivers. SCDNR, the Oconee Pilot's Association and local Rotary clubs worked together to provide free lifejacket fittings, T-shirts and "Josh the Otter" books to participants to emphasize safety while swimming.

The following week, attendance more than quadrupled when around 180 children and parents arrived for a mini science camp. After watching various experiments and experiencing first-hand the hair-raising power of static electricity, participants headed outside for the grand finale — a geyser of Mentos candy and Diet Coke.

The power of electricity and chemical change was not to be outdone by the promise of touching a tarantula.

"Last week's Critter Keeper beat that (attendance)," Dow said. "We had close to 200 people, so it has been well attended."

Randy Miller, better known as the Critter Keeper, brought along his sidekicks ranging from an albino Burmese python to an Australian Bearded Dragon to provide participants with a hands-on experience with animals from all around the world.

The presentation was "standing room only," according to Dow.

"They got to see and touch animals they would never get to otherwise," she said. "(Miller) was very involved in educating the kids about the animals and animal safety."

Though Dow can't pick her favorite activity so far — it's a toss up between science camp and the critters — she said the crowd favorite was definitely the animal presentation.

"We're an educational center, so we try to make everything fun or educational," Dow said. "Most of them are both."

Today, WOE is showing the movie "Wreck-It Ralph" and providing popcorn to bring kids in out of the heat. Next week, storyteller Rodger Ellington will bring his antics to the auditorium to pass along the art of verbal storytelling.

At the grand finale on July 30, participants will have the opportunity to learn about backyard birds with Terry Miller.

"Our amazing backyard birds will be the them," said Miller.

"I want them to know places they can go to learn more about birds," Miller said. "The botanical garden is a great place to go, as well as South Cove Park.

"We'll talk about what's fun about them, where they came from and interesting characteristics about each other them."

Dow said there will be a craft at the Backyard Birds presentation, and Miller hinted it will likely be something to help attract birds so children will be able to see some of the birds they will hear about.

"We'll work toward engaging them, keeping them interested and teaching them as well."

With plans to make bird feeders and teach participants how to distinguish one bird's song from another, Miller said he wants to get the kids "hands on and involved."

Though the Wednesdays at WOE program is new this year, WOE has kept its other popular summer activities.

The official wrap-up for the summer programming will be Aug. 1 when Duke plays "The LEGO Movie" on its big screen.

"We have speakers pointed toward the lake, so boaters can come in and anchor to watch the movie," Dow said. "And everybody is welcome to bring blankets, chairs and picnics to come enjoy the evening."

The fifth annual hunting and fishing day will be held at Oconee Nuclear Station from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Sept. 20. This event, in partnership with SCDNR, Clemson Extension, Clemson Archery and a many other groups, provides an outdoor experience for families.

"They can come and experience the outdoors," Dow said. "They get to do archery, they can shoot air rifles, we will have kayaks they can go out on and we have fishing."

Though the lake is stocked and the fishing is catch-and-release, Dow said this may be the one time a year kids get to participate in these activities.

"Sometimes this is the only opportunity some kids get to experience these types of things in the outdoors, so we try to put it all in one place at one time," she said. "Everything is free that day, so it's a great opportunity to learn about all these outdoor recreation opportunities that we have in our area."

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UPCOMING FREE EVENT

- **Outdoor** movie night: "The LEGO Movie" showing Aug. 1 at 9 p.m.
- **National** Huntin and Fishing Day, Sept. 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

WEDNESDAY EVENTS:

- **Today:** "Wreck-It Ralph" movie day
- **July 23:** Storytelling with Rodger Ellington
- **July 30:** Backyard birds with Terry Miller