

FitzMall.com features:

CarFind
Search new
and used

AutoMalls
Find products
and services

Fitzgerald AUTO MALLS
FitzMall.com SINCE 1966



All vehicles have discounted, delivered, no haggle prices. Shop now!



Gazette.Net

Maryland Community Newspapers Online



Now



Sat



Sun

►5-day forecast

Montgomery

Prince George's

Frederick

Carroll

Sports

Politics

Business

Entertainment

Speak Out

Jobs

More News

- Urban legend lives in Riverdale Park
- Suburbs mad at WASA moves
- Take a 'Taste of Bethesda' at weekend festival
- Organization to pay bills for soldiers' families
- Residents want new middle school built in Clarksburg

This land is your land

After-school club connects students with the outdoors

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006

by Melissa A. Chadwick
Staff Writer

A group of eager schoolchildren picked their way along deer tracks and through the sprouting winter wheat in Barnesville on Monday.

The students, from The Barnesville School and Monocacy Elementary School, made a myriad of discoveries in their outdoor classroom.

They stopped to observe a salamander here, a tree struck by lightning there and listened to the gentle trickle of a spring in the background as they inspected some small bones – likely those of a deer – near the base of a dead tree.

Every opportunity gave Garth Seely, program director of Landscape and Nature Discoveries Inc., or LAND — a Dickerson non-profit — the chance to educate the students about what they were witnessing.

The group, part of a growing after-school club operating in western Montgomery County run by the Dickerson organization, spends a couple hours once a week learning about the stuff found in their backyards.

In their case, their backyard is the Agricultural Reserve.

The program started six years ago when Dickerson residents Garth and Amy Seely's son was in pre-school. The couple recognized a need for educational opportunities where



Click [here](#) to enlarge this photo
Brian Lewis/The Gazette
Garth Seely is on a mission to teach kids about nature. At The Barnesville School on Monday, he helped Samantha Hoover plant a native dogwood tree.



Have
YOU
been
Spotted?

Find out.
Click here.

students learn how to appreciate, conserve and understand the outdoors — much of which they learn about inside a classroom.

“They’re learning about rocks and soil inside,” said Amy Seely, LAND’s executive director. “We need to get them outside, let them touch it and feel it and they’ll learn that much more.”

So, drawing upon Garth Seely’s work and knowledge from 20 years as a landscaper and Amy Seely’s education in horticulture, the pair started offering nature-based field trips while son Thayer was in pre-school. Garth’s passion for the project grew and he realized “this is important. This could be good,” Amy Seely said.

LAND’s clubs are now in Poolesville and Monocacy elementary schools, and the group just finished a two-week stint at Barnesville School on Monday. The Seely’s hope to expand LAND to other schools and provide more in-depth educational opportunities by working with science teachers.

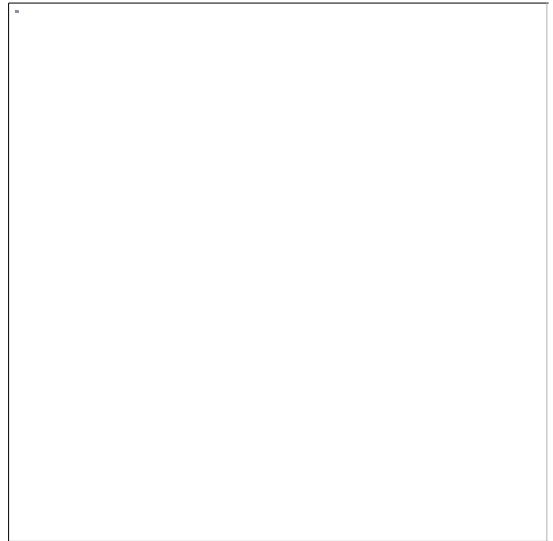
“These kids all live in the Agriculture Reserve,” Seely said. “This is important to them to learn to respect it and learn about it so they can be the ones, hopefully, to protect it in the future.”

LAND received its non-profit status in April, and since then organizers have been busy making a presence in the upcounty. The clubs planted flowers around businesses in Dickerson and Poolesville, and LAND planted thousands of daffodil bulbs and more than 1,000 native grasses at the entrances to the Woodstock Equestrian Center in Beallsville.

In the spring, LAND sponsored a site for the Potomac River Watershed Clean Up.

Garth Seely, who has operated Gardens by Garth Landscaping in Dickerson since about 1980, is self-trained.

Before the nature hike that took the students through the wheat field and into the autumn oasis across Peach Tree Road from The



[Bethesda Condos](#)

New Releases Now Available! Condos starting from the high \$200s

www.CrescentCondo.com

[Gaithersburg Foreclosures](#)

Free list of foreclosures, fixer uppers and estate sales save 1000's

capitalregionhomesales.com

[Silver Spring Homes](#)

Free list of foreclosures, fixer uppers and estate sales save 1000's

metrohomesinfo.com

[The Eden Apartments](#)

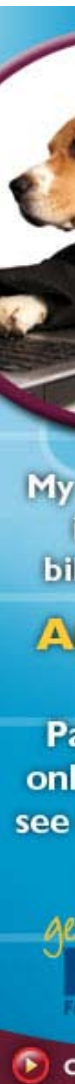
Luxury Living in Baltimore Model Available! Tempted yet?

www.EdenApts.com



Click [here](#) to enlarge this photo
Brian Lewis/The Gazette

Analiese and Samantha Hoover, students at The Barnesville School, inspect a salamander they discovered during a nature hike after school on Monday.



Barnesville School on Monday, Garth Seely talked about a variety of items he brought to share.

“I try to bring in an animal or a bug once a week,” Garth Seely explained. “It gets some of the kids screaming sometimes. Quite loudly.”

There was a muffled squeal Monday when he pulled out a handful of tiny bird skulls he came across during a nature walk with his club members at Monocacy Elementary. Gently, he passed them around the group.

One boy peered into the bird’s eye sockets.

“Wow,” he breathed.

Then, the group hypothesized about how the skulls got on the ground. The wind? Perhaps. But most likely, Garth Seely explained, it was the work of a larger bird that feeds on smaller birds.

After a look at three different types of birds’ nests and a discussion about milkweed, the group headed off for its first project: planting three dogwood trees on a knoll next to the school.

Now, second-grade Barnesville student Jack Magruder, 8, said he can check in on the trees while he’s at school.

“I learned that you have to put fertilizer down before you plant,” said Magruder, who said he has two gardens at home where he likes to plant daffodils, radishes and carrots.

After the hike, Anna DeSoto, 9, a Monocacy student helping at Barnesville, said the club helped her learn how to identify flowers and different plants. She said she hopes to one day enroll in the Global Ecology Studies magnet program at Poolesville High School so she can learn more about the Earth in her quest to become a veterinarian.

She has already learned an important lesson.

“I’ve learned you’re never too young to help nature.”