



Elachee Nature Science Center: 2020 Highlights

- The 8-Mile Hiking Trail System in Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve has stayed open to the public, without interruption, throughout 2020. Thanks to the support from individuals, community partners and a skilled volunteer trail crew and Elachee staff who protect and maintain these pedestrian walkways, tens of thousands of school children and nature lovers have found solace this year in the grandeur of this 1,440-acre protected green space that is part of a park representing 13.5-percent of the land mass in the Gainesville city limits. In early 2020, Elachee completed the hiking trails signage update. Elachee staff and committed volunteers have both replaced and repaired a number of aging pedestrian bridge structures, and also deployed for emergency clean-up when several intense storms wrought havoc along the trails this past spring and fall.
- The Hiking for Health: 150-Mile Chicopee Challenge launched January 1, 2020 to encourage individuals to discover Chicopee Woods and enjoy nature while 'getting their steps in.' Many individuals have reached and obliterated their personal goals for the year. In fact, five different hikers report they have each now logged over 1,000 miles hiked in Chicopee Woods since January 1... wow!
- In spite of a pandemic, some 280 campers enjoyed a summer nature immersion experience during Camp Elachee 2020. Although having to reduce the number of campers who could participate and scaling down the camp season from nine to five weeks, this outdoor adventure was just what the doctor ordered for these children during their summer break. The logistics of holding these weekly outdoor nature day camps, working within the parameters of CDC guidelines and safety/hygiene protocols, required a creative approach. Regimens we put in place also gave our team time to test best practices in preparation for reopening the Nature Center for in-person visitation and programming this summer and for the 2020-21 academic year. Elachee Nature Academy Preschool and Kindergarten-1st Grade students started school August 10. They spend 85% of their school day outdoors in creative discovery and experiential learning – and love it!
- Tragically, Elachee's resident Red-tailed Hawk aviary was vandalized in April and this magnificent, yet blind in one eye raptor escaped. Elachee welcomed a new winged ambassador, a Great Horned Owl, to its teaching corps this summer. He is now the 'star' of his own Instagram feed and routinely participates in Elachee's Saturday Live Animal Demonstrations to the delight of visitors.
- Elachee hosted the 10th Annual Trillium Trek Trail Run & Walk six months after its originally scheduled date. As well, the monthly Elachee Science Nights have grown in popularity as a lifelong learning program series. Starting in August, these programs transitioned to free virtual presentations that will continue in this format through May 2021. Elachee was unable to hold its beloved Raptor Fest and Snake Day this year.
- The 20th Annual Flights of Fancy Benefit & Auction took place as scheduled in April, but as a virtual event. Elachee's sole fundraiser each year, Elachee supporters and sponsors joined to help raise \$123,857. Of that total, \$21,175 was given in support of Elachee's Fund the Need 2020 appeal to enhance environmental education outreach capacity. As a result, Elachee's plans for conducting STEAM-based PreK-12 school programs shifted for the 2020-21 school year. Throughout the summer, Elachee's education team filmed a series of the most requested school field trip environmental courses. These hybrid programs are now available to provide PreK-12 students access to ecology and nature lessons as an interactive distance learning alternative for teachers. This popular option has proven critically important as field trips to Elachee and/or visits to schools throughout metro Atlanta and northeast Georgia to conduct Elachee in Your Classroom outreach programs have been curtailed the first few months of the 2020-21 school year.

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