

This past fall at an Adventure Day Camp, several Lime Hollow campers and I had a conversation about the upcoming 2020 summer camp season, sharing ideas for weekly camp themes and planning ways to improve our Lime Hollow garden. During the discussion, camper Hunter Barlow, suggested a camp theme he called “Building a Better Nature”. The kids and I liked the idea immediately. In a simple way Hunter’s phrase captured what we are inspired to do and aspire to be at Lime Hollow Nature Center.

Over the winter months my thoughts frequently returned to Hunter’s theme. It had struck a chord in me. His idea reflected the notion that any act of caretaking, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, does make a positive impact. It asked us to choose to make a difference. It encouraged action.

Hunter’s simple words challenged me to do more. It made me think of how we build a better nature at Lime Hollow. I didn’t want to limit his idea to only one week of camp but needed to incorporate this principle into all ten weeks of summer camp. Glenn recognized the significance of the theme and decided to incorporate it as our yearly theme for the nature center.

Over the past decade Lime Hollow has been involved with stewardship of a growing number of acres. Our beautiful nature center incorporates 474 acres of second growth woodlands interspersed with meadows, streams, ponds, and shrublands. It contains a truly diverse mix of central New York’s significant habitats. Every April we schedule an Earth Day Clean up and, in the fall, we have monthly trail workdays in September and October. Our staff of four full time folks do our best to accomplish our landscape caretaking goals, but we rely on the volunteerism of our community friends to get more done.

Hunter’s “Building a Better Nature” is more than simply pulling an invasive plant out of the ground, more than just building a bird box and setting it out on the landscape. It includes a land ethic like Aldo Leopold talked about decades ago. Leopold wrote “When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” This notion recognizes that individuals can make a difference in restoring natural environments. While it includes physical acts like planting trees, it also includes the intellectual acts of learning more about our habitats and the plants and animals that live here. It ultimately is a community act. It invites each of us to establish a deeper relationship with a place and begin to care for the health and well-being of such a place, like Lime Hollow.

This March marks the beginning of our “Building a Better Nature” series. I will be hosting workshops from 1-3 pm on the second Saturday of each month this year. These Saturday afternoons will include a physical caretaking project, but also a Lime Hollow specific natural history lesson to increase our knowledge. After completing our caretaking task, hopefully we’ll have enough time to simply enjoy Cortland County’s best nature center.

For the first workshop on March 14<sup>th</sup>, my goal is to build 1-2 Barred Owl nest boxes. For many species of birds, a shortage of places to nest impacts their breeding success. While Barred Owls are often heard hooting their recognizable “Who cooks for you?” call at Lime Hollow, one limiting factor for nesting owls is the availability of suitable nesting locations. Barred Owls are large, brown to grey owls with barring on the chest. They have rounded heads, no ear tufts, and large dark eyes. They prefer mature forests with both deciduous and evergreen trees and nest in tree cavities, often near water. Building a few well-constructed owl boxes and locating them along Beaver Brook under the hemlocks will provide our local Barred Owls additional safe nesting locations. I hope you can join me on March 14<sup>th</sup> to start our “Building a Better Nature” series. Watch for updates on the workshops to follow.