

Daycampers learn about nutrition, visit author



Lori Taylor (left), tells funny tales about her travels around Michigan, for the Story Hike at Pictured Rock National Lakeshore.

by Neal Simons

Alger County youth in the DayKamp program from Alger Parks and Rec, were given a crash course in nutritious foods before meeting a popular children's author at Pictured Rocks on Thursday, July 26, 2018. Vicki Ballas, the SNAP-Ed Program Associate for MSU Extension, had kids try out different kinds of nutritious herbs this week for her Great Garden Detective nutrition program. The herbs tasted were parsley, pesto, and cilantro. After the kids tasted each herb individually, Ballas had them try out foods with the herbs applied to show how tasty they become. "I wanted to show that if you mix [the herbs] together and put them on something, they help to enhance the dish," said Ballas. "Hopefully, the kids will expand what they eat by experimenting and trying that."

After the lesson, Ballas took the kids out to the People's Garden in Munising, where they were shown different edible plants and weeds. "We tried wild edibles, because it gives them something to eat and try before the other stuff comes up," said Ballas. The kids planted in the People's Garden at the beginning of the DayKamp program in June, growing oregano this year. "We do

the whole cycle for this garden. We plant it, we weed it, we water it, we harvest it," said Ballas. "We get to learn about the food we're planting, and then we get to eat it." Ballas was pleased with how open the kids were to tasting different foods, and said that trust is a major factor in getting them to try something out. "I've talked to them about how you're not going to like everything, and it's not a horrible thing to not like something," said Ballas. "If you don't like it, you spit it out, rinse out your mouth, and move on to something else. The kids have gotten really brave about that, and they try everything I bring to them."

After enjoying the beach at Sand Point, the kids were taking to the Munising Falls Visitor Center in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore (PRNL) for a Story Hike. The hike involved a short trek to Munising Falls, and ended with a greeting by Michigan Children's Author, Lori Taylor. Originally from Clarkston, Taylor is well-known as the writer and illustrator of the "Holly Wild" book series, chronicling the adventures of the titular character all over Michigan. "[Holly Wild] is exploring with her friends, she runs into other kids that become friends, and

they learn about each area that they go to," said Taylor. Several Holly Wild books include "Bamboozled on Beaver Island," "Let Sleeping Bear Dunes Lie," "Packing for the Porkies," and "Questpadition for Da Yooper Stone." Her latest entry, a picture book called "The Young Geek's Guide to Getting Outside," is meant to be a prequel to the Holly Wild series. Pages of the book were posted along the Story Hike, with each page pertaining to natural areas in Michigan. "It's for children 2-6, geo-explorer kids, and it's meant to get them outdoors and explore their big backyard," said Taylor.

Taylor developed a love of the outdoors at a young age, and has traveled to all the natural areas Michigan has to offer. She also created several educational exhibits for nature centers in Michigan as a freelance illustrator, and was selected as an artist-in-residence by the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, and the Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan (LLF). She would take her kids with her as she explored, and takes her grandchildren on her travels today. "It's about teaching the kids to love what's out there, so they want to protect it," said Taylor. "It's

having fun, and being educational. I've always tried to mesh those two things in my books."

LLF Michigan collaborated with Taylor in organizing the event, as a supplemental donation for the use of its grant by PRNL Interagency Education Specialist, Melissa O'Donnel. "We're pleased that the Munising DayKamp was able to participate, and we look forward to continuing to work with the National Park Service, Pictured Rock National Lakeshore, and Hiawatha National Forest," said LLF Board Chair Member, Dr. Nancy Wiseman Seminoff. Seminoff was eager to work with O'Donnel again for this special event, and was excited to see Taylor interacting with the Alger County youth. "Melissa O'Donnel is just an outstanding advocate for the Park Service," said Seminoff. "Not only does she have great ideas, but she has excellent follow through and is able to work with the staff to get them engaged." Seminoff hopes to continue to reach out to Alger County through LLF Michigan's grant program, and intends to continue to promote literacy and a better understanding of our environment in Michigan.

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