

A Parent's Letter



Three years ago my daughter, Elizabeth, and I asked to volunteer at the NEWC as she explored her interest in animal medicine. I figured my role to be an extra hand supporting staff and building, and watch her embrace every learning opportunity with teenage exuberance. Our experience has been so much more. We've been welcomed into a community with a purpose towards the environment. We are asked to learn something new every day there, and in some small way share what we have learned with others.

Every Sunday, other parent/daughter teams arrive rain or shine. A common thread runs through the center – community effort. We all pitch in to help the center meet its day to day needs, as well as help in outreach to welcome the public and share our new knowledge with you. One Sunday a family brought an injured hawk. I showed them the educational animals and wildlife we had that day. I'm not certain who had more fun – the adults or their son. Birthday parties are always hectic, but rewarding to see the smiles of young children seeing new animals for the first time. Other days – actually most of them, my daughter teaches me something new - knowledge gained from her day's effort there. A role reversal I never expected as a parent, but one I welcome as I see her gain new knowledge about both herself and the environment. None of this would be possible without the efforts of a small staff and many volunteers – a community of people dedicated to the success of the center.

Life experiences at the center trump any textbook learning. No two days are alike, especially in the spring when we are overrun with a hundred or more feathered, fuzzy and yes – very cute babies. The busiest time of the year is around the corner, and we can't wait to get busy. I am grateful to have this opportunity to briefly share my observations and I ask you to consider visiting us (again?) soon, or telling your friends and neighbors to come for a visit. Whether it's the first time here, or returning – I hope that our efforts help you finish the day with new-found knowledge of your environment.

Dick Austin



Elizabeth Austin feeding a young raccoon (top), assisting Dr. Mertz in the Odd Pet Vet clinic (bottom left) and observing Dr. Mertz performing a surgery. Elizabeth, inspired by her work and education at the Center, will study pre-veterinarian medicine at Dickinson College next fall.