



Lake Erie Nature & Science Center

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DIRECTOR MARKS 20 YEARS AT THE HELM OF LAKE ERIE NATURE & SCIENCE CENTER

Larry Richardson Says West Side Center's Mission Is More Important Now Than Ever Before

Bay Village, Ohio --- As the need to grasp the increasingly complex issues surrounding nature and the environment grows, the Executive Director of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center quietly marked a milestone this month: 20 years at the helm of the Bay Village organization devoted to nature and science education.

Larry D. Richardson has presided over an expanding operation during the most recent third of the Center's 60-year history. When Richardson came to Lake Erie Nature & Science Center in 1988, it was a treasured but small community organization, conducting about 250 programs a year. Today it's truly a regional center of excellence; with more than 2,400 programs each year and expanded facilities that include more than 100 live animals on exhibit.

"I think successful non-profit organizations have to be flexible, to listen to the needs of the community and to evolve in response to those needs," said Richardson. "That's what we've tried to do in the last 20 years and it's our commitment moving forward."

Board President Patrick Mazur praised Richardson's leadership. "It's not easy to lead an organization to grow and change while maintaining its historic mission and unique place in the hearts of the surrounding community, but Larry, with the support of the staff and board, has been able to do that," said Mazur. "Larry is not resting on past accomplishments, either. He sees a future where the Center plays a key role in sparking responsibility for the natural world as we face so many complicated environmental issues."

"I never wanted to change the basic philosophy of the place," added Richardson. "Our founder, Bert Fleming's original idea that children learn best through hands-on discovery still works. In fact, our children and families need the very real connection to nature we provide today more than ever."

Richardson's trademark cowboy hat and mustache make him a recognizable, down-to-earth figure to many of the hundreds of thousands of people who have enjoyed the Center's programs over the years. An avid birder, whose "life list" (of different bird species sighted) is 1,884, Richardson has specialized in leading groups from Northeast Ohio on birding expeditions to 15 destinations all over the world. He just returned from Costa Rica earlier this year, where he added to that list.

Richardson's travels to some of the most beautiful places on the planet have heightened his awareness of environmental stewardship. "In my mind, we need to be thinking in terms of generations and contemplating the issues that our children and grandchildren will face and asking ourselves what we can do now," he said.

Richardson is also responsible for recruiting and hiring all three of his long-time department directors to Lake Erie Nature & Science Center: Director of Education, Darci Sanders; Director of Wildlife, Dave Wolf and Director of Community Relations and Fundraising, Renee Burslem. Richardson says, "I truly believe in putting competent people in place and supporting and mentoring them. We've worked as a team to build up a respected roster of educational programs, an outstanding wildlife rehabilitation program and engaging exhibits."

Among Richardson's continuing challenges is educating people that the non-profit Center is not a tax-supported entity, even though it's located in Huntington Reservation. "We have a fantastic base of donors who continue to contribute to the financial health of our operation," he said. "But, we still hear from people who mistakenly believe they are already supporting us through their taxes."

Richardson is able to share his two decades of experiences at Lake Erie Nature & Science Center with Nature Centers across the country as Vice President of Professional Services with ANCA (Association of Nature Centers Administrators). Before becoming Executive Director of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center in 1988, Richardson worked as an Ohio State Park Ranger and Park Manager. He is a graduate of The Ohio State University, School of Natural Resources.

Lake Erie Nature & Science Center is a non-profit organization dedicated to nature and science education, including live animals, wildlife rehabilitation, interactive exhibits and a world-class planetarium. The independent Center is located at 28728 Wolf Road in Bay Village. You can post your favorite Lake Erie Nature & Science Center memory from the past 20 years at www.lensc.org. Click on the Chirp & Chatter blog icon on the homepage and find the entry Label for *20 Years of Memories*.