

News Release

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Nature-based Camp Undergoes Facilities Makeover

Sustainable design strategies are aimed at complementing camp's mission

KALAMAZOO, Mich., Oct. 17, 2013 – One of the country's older nature-based day camps has undergone a significant facilities makeover to enhance its mission to provide safe experiences that allow children to grow into active and respectful community members through exploration of the natural world.

The focal point of the \$1.1 million makeover is the rehabilitation, adaptive re-use and expansion of a 5,000-square-foot timber-framed barn, formerly housing farm animals and now serving as the program center for the [Kalamazoo Nature Center Camp](#).

“The camp had been housed in a renovated residence at the edge of the Kalamazoo Nature Center and adjacent to a noisy road. Rehabilitating the existing barn structure, located in the heart of the 1,100-acre nature center, allowed us to experience cost savings by reusing an available existing structure located where campers would be immersed in nature,” said Jim Nicolow, a principal and the director of sustainability at architecture and planning firm [Lord, Aeck & Sargent](#). LAS led the design effort for the new Kalamazoo Nature Camp facilities.

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The barn is surrounded by a wooded area forming the new 23-acre area dedicated to the New Camp Program. The New Camp is surrounded by the 1,100 acres of the [Kalamazoo Nature Center](#) (KNC) and is actively used by the campers. The barn is now called the Timber-Frame Barn and houses the camp administrative office, catering kitchen, meeting and storage spaces, restrooms and an art studio/ecology lab to allow campers, ages 3-18, hands-on nature study experiences.

Located on a slope, the Timber-Frame Barn has two unconnected levels, with the front entry leading to the upper level and the back entry leading to the lower level. LAS designed additions on the front and back sides of the barn.

Sustainable design strategies complement camp's mission

“Since KNC Camp’s purpose is to inspire people, and especially kids to care for the environment through experiences that lead them to understand their connection to the natural world, our design for the existing barn rehabilitation and the additions, incorporates a host of green products and strategies,” Nicolow said. “Some of these include natural cross-ventilation, daylighting, radiant heating and the use of recycled and local natural materials.”

The front addition on the upper level includes a new porch pavilion and a camper welcome center, which span the length of the old barn. The pavilion entry is constructed with an exposed, environmentally friendly, glue-laminated structure to extend the aesthetic of the timber frame barn in a contemporary way. The new addition is clad in composite siding made from a durable recycled wood and cement matrix, and the base of the supporting columns making the front entry is clad in local river rock, reinforcing its connection to the local surroundings.

The 727-square-foot upper level front addition houses the camp’s welcome center and includes the camp director’s office, a catering kitchen, a barrier-free restroom and a shower.

The main upper level of the existing barn was re-surfaced with a topping concrete to provide a weather protection for the level below and a new durable surface for the large open area to conduct nature-based arts and crafts and rainy-day gatherings for the entire camp population, a significant enhancement to the camp facilities. Since the upper level is not mechanically conditioned space, LAS designed large operable wood-frame windows to replace the small ones located on the sides of the old barn, facilitating natural cross-ventilation so that the space is comfortably habitable in spring, summer and fall. Clerestory windows added at the gabled ends enable the upper level to be completely daylit during most times.

On the back of the upper level, LAS added large new windows and doors to the old barn providing access to a new covered wood deck of nearly 700-square-foot, giving campers an outdoor space where they can continue their programs during inclement weather.

The Timber-Frame Barn's lower level, used primarily as an art studio/ecology lab, was conditioned for year-round use with high-performance spray-foam insulation and a new energy-efficient radiant slab heating system. The heated flooring enhances thermal comfort for year-round use by school and adult programs after the typical camp season. Laboratory casework, salvaged from a nearby high school, now serves as arts and crafts equipment storage. Other lower level spaces in the existing section of the barn include a meeting room for staff and two storage rooms for art and lab supplies.

The lower level addition, located directly beneath the wood deck, contains two new ADA-compliant bathrooms with dual flush toilets and low-flow faucets to conserve water. Both are daylit with high clerestory windows as well.

Range of new structures support camp's mission and program

The now-7,000-square-foot barn rehabilitation and additions form a new heart of the camp, with a range of new structures to support the camp's mission and program. These

include an outdoor amphitheater and stage, group activity pavilions, a natural playground for free play, with a wooden water tower play feature, composting garden, a unique 250-foot-long Slip 'N Slide, changing areas, windmill, low ropes course, archery range, and trail network.

The group activity pavilions include three rustic picnic shelters and a fire ring, conceptualized by LAS and constructed by local artisans using natural materials. The open-air amphitheater, also constructed of wood, is used daily for camp gatherings. The shelters, pavilions and wood fencing were constructed using wood taken from on-site. The wood was milled from Black Locust, which was being removed as an invasive species and is very rot resistant.

The natural playground, called Nature's Playground, was developed by The Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio, which collaborated with the camp master planning effort and served as the project's landscape architect. The wooden water tower play feature was designed by Byce & Associates, which served as architect of record and consulting engineer for the project.

Many other outdoor elements – a multi-stage zip line, treehouse and green roof to be located on a section of the Timber-Frame Barn already designed and built to accommodate it – will be added to the camp site over the coming years. Funding availability will be a determining factor in project priorities, according to Bill Rose, president and chief executive of the not-for-profit KNC, where the KNC Camp resides. The current makeover, which was completed in time for the 2013 camp sessions that began in mid-June, was funded by a \$6.6 million Capital Campaign that included renovations and improvements to the camp facilities and three other KNC programs.

Space that inspires and develops skills

As for the KNC Camp space, Rose said, "We now have a space that inspires fun, creativity and is welcoming to all who arrive. Campers have their own secluded group spaces where they

launch from to explore the entire KNC property. In the event of inclement weather, campers and staff have a large open space in the barn and a beautiful covered deck where they can continue their program without risk, and the addition of water play and specifically Nature's Playground, allow kids of all ages to explore, dig, get wet and most importantly, have fun in nature!

"Furthermore," Rose said, "through all the improvements we've enhanced our ability to give campers more opportunities for outdoor exploration and play. Today's children are increasingly attached to electronic media, so they are more obese, more prone to attention disorders and less likely to be able to effectively communicate with their peers. At KNC summer camp, we use the outdoors to connect campers with each other, the natural world and their communities. We provide them with a safe and fun background to develop their mental and physical growth, improve motor skills and strengthen social skills, all around the context of nature."

Other uses for the barn

When KNC Camp is not in session, the Timber-Frame Barn has other uses. It is currently being used five days a week by a class of 11th and 12th graders interested in conservation and natural resources. The class is constructing its own new site, and when it's completed and the class moves, the Timber-Frame Barn will become the home of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson, a study trip for elementary age classes that spans five consecutive days at the KNC. From October through the month of May, ABNL students will use the comfortable heated/cooled lower level of the barn as classroom space when not having outdoor instruction.

The project team

The Kalamazoo Nature Center Camp project team included:

- Lord, Aeck & Sargent, Inc. (Ann Arbor, Mich. office) – co-master planner; design architect
- The Johnson Hill Land Ethics Studio (Ann Arbor) – co-master planner; landscape architect
- Byce & Associates (Kalamazoo, Mich.) – architect of record; consulting engineer (structural, civil and MEP/FP)
- Miller-Davis Company (Kalamazoo, Mich.) – construction manager

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural and planning firm serving clients in academic, historic preservation, scientific, arts and cultural, multi-family housing and mixed-use, and urban design and planning markets. The firm's core values are responsive design, technological expertise and exceptional service. In 2007, LAS was one of the first architecture firms to adopt [The 2030 Challenge](#), an initiative whose ultimate goal is the design of carbon-neutral buildings, or buildings that use no fossil-fuel greenhouse gas-emitting energy to operate, by the year 2030. LAS is also calling for increased transparency in the building products industry by urging manufacturers to disclose the chemical components of their products utilizing the [Health Product Declaration](#),TM an industry standard format for conveying details about product content and associated health information, or [Declare](#), the “nutrition label” for building products launched by the International Living Future Institute.

Lord, Aeck & Sargent has offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Atlanta, Georgia; Austin, Texas; Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Lexington, Kentucky. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.

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