



Blue Lotus Farm & Retreat Center

"Serving those with special needs, located in the countryside of Newburg, Wisconsin"

Fall 2014

A Day of Fun for the Autism Society of Southeastern WI



A misty morning did not stop the Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin's family picnic at Blue Lotus on Sunday, September 21. Fathers, mothers, grandparents, brothers and sisters, were all here to enjoy the day. Who cared about a little drizzle once you were racing each other in kayaks, canoes and pedal boats, or exploring the island? And, as the parents and kids fishing off the dock can tell you, there's nothing like a misty day for catching fish. If you did get damp and hungry, volunteers had a bonfire going on shore. Sailors and fishers left boats and bobbers, and headed up the bank to toast marshmallows and make s'mores. Soon everybody was pleasantly sticky and deliciously full.

While the older set were fishing and boating, younger families played on the swings, explored the trails, or made "I spy" bottles of tiny tokens hidden in colored rice. Around noon, everyone gathered in the pavilion for a hot dog lunch. Some families were here for the first time, and lunch brought the entire group together. For one family, it was a special chance to celebrate a birthday. For everyone, it was a day of sharing. Talking, sharing stories, letting your children play in the quiet country air – and simply being with other people who understood where you were and cared, as you cared about them – what could be better than that?

The Autism Society of Southeastern WI provides support for people with autism spectrum disorders, their families, professionals, and others, by sharing information, supporting research, providing networking opportunities and promoting awareness through education and training. More information can be found at www.aseww.org.

A Memorable Arrival with the Grand Avenue Club **By: Fred Bliffert**

A long yellow school bus pulls up to our parking lot. As the official greeter of the day, I introduce myself and welcome our guests, who are from the Grand Avenue Club (GAC) in Milwaukee – an organization providing services to individuals who have experienced mental illness. I tell them that I can answer absolutely any question that they might have. *"Where is the closest bathroom?"* is the predominant inquiry. All are wearing appropriate clothing for the outdoor activities we have planned for them. However, the last person out of the bus is all dressed up in his Sunday's best.

"Hi, and welcome to the Blue Lotus. My name is Fred."

"Well hello Fred, my name is Anthony."

"Anthony, you're wearing a suit! And those shoes – they look brand new! And a colorful tie! You've really got it all together, you look fabulous."

"Well thank you very much, Fred."

In response, I stand back, open my arms wide, and say *"Well Anthony, how do I look?"*

"Well Fred, you look ---- uh ---- you look, uh ---- uh ---- HAPPY."

I truly looked like a schlub, but he really didn't want to hurt my feelings. We were buddies for the rest of the day.



Above: Group Photo during the GAC Outing. Hard to see, but Fred & Anthony (in his suit!) are pictured back right.



Fred Bliffert is a founding member and current board president of Blue Lotus. He is also the self-proclaimed Vice President of the Blue Lotus Maintenance Department.

For more information on programs & events, please visit www.bluelotusfarm.org

Blue Lotus Farm & Retreat Center is a 501c3 tax exempt charitable organization

A Wonderful Partnership Continues with MSOE



Once again, MSOE students have brought their creative energies to Blue Lotus. On Sunday, October 12, they cleared the trails and shored up the sagging deck overlooking the lake. Wielding pickaxes and loppers, the students made short work of juniper branches and roots encroaching on the trails. They pruned, dug up stumps, and hauled branches

to the bonfire, which crackled in the sunshine. No one needs to worry now about tripping over hidden roots or getting entangled in prickly undergrowth. Thanks to these MSOE "lumberjacks," the trails at Blue Lotus are safe again!

Back at the lake, students directed by MSOE alumnus and Project Engineer for J3 Engineering, James Gerloff and assisted by engineer and MSOE alum, Derek Putz, worked on the deck. Designed and built by MSOE students within the Servant Leadership Program six years ago, weather and water had undermined the center. Three brave young women crawled into the narrow space beneath the deck to raise it. With hands and trowels, they dug out a new foundation, which they filled with rocks and sand from the buckets volunteers hauled in. On top of the rocks, they constructed a new support of level planks and upright joists. Muddy, chilled and cramped, the students joked their way through this magnificent reconstruction project.

Returning lumberjacks, along with other volunteers helped get Blue Lotus ready for winter. They emptied hanging baskets and planters, trimmed back flower borders, and carried benches and chairs to the barn for winter storage. What a wonderful day of service, willing hands, and laughter! Thank you always, MSOE!



Meet Casey Gill, Volunteer Supreme!

If you turn onto the road to Blue Lotus these days, you will notice how much brush has been cleared away. A lot of this is thanks to Casey Gill, who has brought his Bobcat and brush-hog to widen the road for emergency vehicles. Three years ago, Casey heard Susan speak about Blue Lotus over the radio. That chance radio broadcast moved him so much that he headed straight to Blue Lotus, where he quickly became part of the family. Casey does infinitely more than widen the road. You'll find him everywhere, doing maintenance, helping children and adults enjoy his own passions for fishing and canoeing, listening to people, smiling at them. As



he says, "Loving people, sharing with them, finding a common denominator, so people can let their guards down," is essential to happiness. Casey volunteers in many places, but he feels that the people at Blue Lotus are very special. He feels graced and humbled to be a steward there.

During this past season, Casey has volunteered nearly 150 hours. Thank you for all your hard work Casey, we are forever grateful!

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