

Doane Breaks Ground for Nature Explore Classroom

Because it's a place to explore and play, the groundbreaking ceremony April 26 for Doane's Nature Explore Classroom will be a celebration.

The event, sponsored by the Crete Nature Collaborative For Children, begins at 6 p.m. at the classroom site south of Hansen Hall on the Crete campus.

Several children will have the honor of officially breaking ground on the 1-acre site, which will eventually include a climbing area, tree house, music and movement area, nature area, water feature and more. Doane College students will demonstrate activities that can be done in the nature classroom once completed.



Example photo from Arbor Day Website

Within the next year, the site will be a park, a gathering space, a classroom, a playground and a site of inquiry, imagination and stewardship.

It will provide a natural play area for families as well as an outdoor environmental education laboratory for Doane students.

The 30-minute groundbreaking program includes speakers Doane President Jacque Carter, Crete Public Schools Superintendent Kyle McGowan, Nancy Rosenow, director of Dimensions Education Foundation for Learning (which started Nature Explore Classrooms), and Doane Education Professor Rod Diercks.

As the groundbreaking ceremony winds up, the Week of the Young Child celebration begins across campus at 6:30 p.m. in the Butler Gymnasium tennis court area. It is organized by a Nebraska Early Childhood Education group. The band "The String Beans" will play and children and families can play and try out various activity booths around the tennis court. There also will be a small food court next to the Butler entrance. The event concludes at 7:30 p.m.

The celebration matches the excitement Doane and Crete community members share for the outdoor nature project. Innovative outdoor spaces like this one have been installed all over the world. Doane will be the first liberal arts college in the state to have one.

"This is a leading-edge project," said Russ Soucek, environmental science professor at Doane. "Many in the environmental community have expressed concern about the lack of time young people spend outdoors. This facility will encourage young people and their families to spend time outdoors and encourage an attitude of stewardship toward the environment."

Crete's project involves many partners, including the City of Crete, Crete Public Schools, and the Crete Community Foundation. Additionally, several individuals and

organizations that support the project have formed the *Crete Nature Collaborative for Children*.

Fundraising for the \$68,000 project is ongoing. To support the outdoor project, donations can be made in care of the *Crete Nature Collaborative for Children* at City Bank, Pinnacle Bank and Union Banks in Crete. For questions or more information, contact rod.diercks@doane.edu or russ.souchek@doane.edu.