

Fun for the whole family

Despite rain, nature event held at Nara trail, chalet

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HOUGHTON - More than two dozen kids and parents got creative Monday at the Nara Nature Park chalet, using birch bark, acorn caps, dried berries and glue to create some natural, seasonal ornaments. They then put on jackets, and ventured out into a downpour for a little bit of snowshoeing.

Article Photos



Dan Roblee/Daily Mining Gazette

Students get geared up to go snowshoeing at the Nara Nature Trails as part of a Winter Family Fun Night hosted by the Western Upper Peninsula Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education and Michigan Tech's Center for Science and Environmental Outreach.

"We're hoping to hear an owl, see some signs of wildlife," said Denise Landsberg, science and environmental educator with the Western Upper Peninsula Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education, who led the night's activities.

The Winter Family Fun Night was the first of several activities planned for youth K-6 and their families, said Landsberg. The event was co-hosted by the Western U.P. Center and Michigan Technological University's Center for Science and Environmental Outreach, with grant funding from the Michigan Association of Environmental Professionals.

"The main idea is just to get people outside," said Marcy Erickson, an environmental science educator with the Western U.P. Center. "I kind of figured they'd get psyched up (to snow shoe). Kids are up for anything really."

The amount of time outside was curtailed a bit by the rain, but the students had no problem staying engaged with ever-more complex ornaments, enough to fill several families' Christmas trees. Autumn Eles, 10, worked on preparing her birch bark snow man for travel in the great outdoors.

"He's going to be skiing," she said, before confidently attaching the skis with a hot glue gun.

"They were super creative," said Erickson. "It seems like they're having fun. It's every kid's dream to use as much glue as you want."

She said the staff had worked to find activities appropriate for all ages and whatever group size showed up for the kickoff event, adding that she was impressed by how many came despite the rain.

Janette Pietila, who brought two grade-schoolers to the event and carried a baby on her arm, said it was nice to "do projects other people thought of," and said the natural ornament materials gave her family the chance to learn about working with nature.

Another parent, Juuan Song, said organizing so many materials at home "would be a big mess," and would probably result in a lot more materials than they could use.

Annie Song, 9, added her seal of approval, noting event organizers had "great ideas" for ornament styles to work on.

That was good to hear for Landsberg, who said she and colleagues had personally collected the birch bark, sticks and many of the other materials themselves.

She said programs will continue bimonthly, on Monday evenings and Saturday afternoons, and will focus on outdoor activities, environmental education and introducing people to the Nara and Maasto Hiihto trail systems.

"I think you have to have programs like this once in a while," she said. "You don't see a lot of environmental programs, and this is both active and educational." To learn more about the program and upcoming activities, call 487-3341.