

## Waban opens new education center

Sanford News and fosters.com

Thursday, November 20, 2014

SANFORD — Waban's TREE Center held a grand-opening reception on Nov. 5 to open the doors of its new Experiential Education Center.

This new facility was renovated from the original Commons building located at the heart of Camp Waban and will serve as a hub for the staff and participants of the organization's Teambuilding, Recreation and Environmental Education (TREE) programs.

Waban Executive Director Neal Meltzer addressed the attendees to thank them for their contributions to the project and to describe the opportunities that the center will create.

"For individuals with developmental and other disabilities, there are very limited opportunities to participate and engage in activities in a hands-on way and learn about our natural surroundings," Meltzer said. "The impediments include physical inaccessibility to various programs and outdoor venues, programs that are not sensitive to the learning styles and needs of disabled individuals, and in some cases an inadvertent but underlying bias that others may have based on lack of knowledge or misapprehensions about working and spending time with people who are 'different.'"



Click image to enlarge

**Waban Assistant Director Gevaise Flynn, left, and Waban Treasurer and volunteer Rosemary Frank, enjoy the grand opening of the TREE Experiential Education Center on Nov. 5. (courtesy by Barbara Allard)**



Click image to enlarge

**Here's an inside look at Waban's new TREE Experiential Education Center. (courtesy by Barbara Allard)**

Continued Meltzer, "The lack of venues for people with special needs where they can have integrated experiences with other community members, provide disability awareness through active engagement in meaningful activities, and learn how to become stewards of our environment contributes to a self-fulfilling and detrimental cycle that can lead to further isolation and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes for this underserved population. In addition, while the therapeutic benefits of broadened social interactions and physical activity are well known and accepted, for individuals with disabilities it can be very difficult to find engaging activities during the late fall, winter, and early spring when the weather gets cooler."

For more than 45 years, the programs at Waban have addressed and increased the well-being of underserved and vulnerable populations. Waban's TREE Center combines that focus with the support and conservation of the natural environment by collaborating with multiple community groups in a broad-based environmental and experiential program that stewards an 84-square mile watershed that encompasses six towns.

Waban's TREE Center offers opportunities in team-building, leadership, recreation, and environmental education, while also providing experiential learning and opportunities for individuals, organizations, businesses, and corporations through its certified staff, meeting spaces, accessible trail system and low ropes challenge elements.

Waban's Adventure Program, which provides challenge-based and experiential activities to over 50 disabled adults per week, now has a permanent "home" and staging ground for broader and more comprehensive activities that integrate environmental education with therapeutic recreation on a year-round basis.

Collectively, these activities provide more opportunities for a better quality of life and quality of place for community residents regardless of their ability level.

The 3,600-square-foot TREE Experiential Education Center is an energy-efficient, four-season program center that will house the environmental education lab as well as snowshoe, skating, boating and other equipment rentals. The Center has a lodgelike atmosphere complete with meeting and exhibit space as well as the Commons Café where hungry and thirsty program participants will be able to get a hot or cold beverage and something tasty to eat. The central fireplace offers a welcoming spot for warming and relaxing with friends.



Click image to enlarge

**Waban's newly renovated Experiential Education Center is a 3,600 square foot energy-efficient, four-season hub for the TREE Program for Teambuilding, Recreation and Environmental Education. (courtesy by Barbara Allard)**

In keeping with TREE's environmental awareness focus, the Experiential Education Center is heated by a geothermal heating system that transfers the heat from two 500-foot-deep wells into a radiant heating system installed underneath the concrete floor. With over 3,000 feet of tubing embedded in the concrete, the floor and the highly insulated building will be comfortable and economical to operate. The energy-efficient LED lighting uses 75-percent less electricity than conventional sources and will last for over 20 years. Water-saving plumbing fixtures range from waterless urinals to sensor-operated and low flow faucets.

"This building and the opportunities that it will provide would not have been possible without a broad coalition of support from many foundations, businesses, organizations, individuals, and volunteers," Waban spokesperson Selena Brock noted in a news release.

That coalition includes Jane's Trust, Kennebunk Savings Bank, the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, the Davis Conservation Fund, Dead River Company, F.R. Carroll Concrete, F.W. Webb, Lassel Architects, Rexel, Sebago Energy Conservation, S. Richer Inc., Sherwin Williams, Southern Maine Re-entry Center, Western Maine Water Systems, Yves Lapointe Drywall, Kittredge Plumbing and Heating, Normand Electric, Coastal Win Air and LWP Consulting, and Luke Levasseur and Waban's Maintenance Department.

To all these organizations and individuals, Meltzer expressed sincere appreciation.

"By engaging more individuals with disabilities in therapeutically healthy and fun environmental and experiential education activities and providing multiple opportunities for local schools and community groups to interact with people with special needs, you have provided the opportunity to broaden the awareness of all participants in the importance of our natural surroundings and give them the tools and experiences that they will need to become ongoing advocates for and stewards of the environment. We are eternally grateful for your support," he said.

The TREE Center is a social enterprise of WABAN. Learn more about the programs and events at the TREE Center online at [www.treecenter.org](http://www.treecenter.org) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TREEctr](https://www.facebook.com/TREEctr).