

newsworthy trends

Outdoor Classrooms: A Smart Way To Teach Teens

(NAPSA)—When it comes to learning, the best classrooms aren't always inside a school. That's the word from experts who say that one of the latest trends involves using the great outdoors to teach teens life lessons.

For instance, Matt Schmitz may seem like an average 18-year-old. He's enjoying his senior year in high school and looking ahead to graduation. However, he's already developed the type of leadership skills that many people strive for well into adulthood.

At age 15, Schmitz learned about the Yellowstone Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a National Park Service program that, he said, let him combine his thirst for knowledge with his passion for the outdoors. "Getting a chance to know Yellowstone is a rare thing," he said. "Plus, it was a chance to spend a summer outdoors, and on my own away from the family."

For 30-35 teens every year, YCC is a work/learn/earn program that teaches lessons in conservation, ecosystem preservation, environmental engineering and leadership. Participants earn minimum wage building bridges, repairing cabins, maintaining trails and more.

Since 1990, YCC has been funded completely by the Community Service program of the Moose fraternal organization. The group began its partnership with Yellowstone National Park in 1988, when fires spread across the park and destroyed hiking trails and visitor facilities. The Yellowstone



It's Only Natural—Outdoor programs have become a popular way to teach teens life lessons.

Youth Fund was established to aid in restoration. Since 1989, the group's members have donated more than \$2 million (\$135,000 annually) in support of the YCC program.

"The Moose is proud to provide this program to youth across the country. It's a vibrant example of our dedication to connecting families and community service," said Shawn M. Baile, Director of Community Service for Moose International.

The friendships Schmitz has developed span coast to coast. "I've met people that I probably never would have met otherwise," he said. "It's a program that enables you to grow as a person. One thing I tell students is that they shouldn't discount themselves. It's not summer camp; it's work. But it's all about teamwork," explained Schmitz.

For more information on the program, visit www.mooseintl.org or www.nps.gov/yell/technical/jobs/ycc.htm, or call Yellowstone National Park headquarters at (307) 344-2148.