



WESTCAVE

OUTDOOR DISCOVERY CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center Challenges Nature Deficit Disorder

Nonprofit Group Announces 2017 Celebration of Children in Nature Winners

May 4, 2017 – AUSTIN, Texas – Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is hosting the 10th Annual Celebration of Children in Nature on the evening of September 29 at the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown Austin. With emcee Evan Smith, Editor of *The Texas Tribune* and Host of the PBS broadcast *Overheard With Evan Smith*, Westcave will be honoring four outstanding individuals and organizations that represent the most innovative and successful regional initiatives to get kids in Central Texas out into nature more often .

The term “nature deficit disorder” refers to the growing concern that childhood in America has largely moved indoors. Today, kids are spending, on average, 12 hours per day in front of multimedia screens and less than 10 minutes each day outside playing and learning in nature. This shift in how we spend our time has serious consequences for the emotional, physical and cognitive health of children. Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is working to change that through its support for the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin (CiNCA).

2017 Award Recipients:

John F. Ahrens Award for Environmental Education – Keep Austin Beautiful

Keep Austin Beautiful has been conducting youth education programs since 2006 and they have built the essential infrastructure, partnerships, and experience to be environmental education leaders in the Austin community. Keep Austin Beautiful engages over 100 schools (K – 12) in the Austin area with programming that allows students to explore nature and problem solve through shared experiences. Curriculum topics are not taught in isolation, but are paired with outdoor service projects to reinforce and act on each lesson. Projects include creek restoration projects, cleanups, invasive species removal, tree plantings, and zero-waste campaigns. Terrific environmental education!

John Covert Watson Award for Vision – Bonnie Baskin, Founder, Science Mill

Science and nature education are inextricably linked and now, more than ever, it is critical that future naturalists and educators be inspired and directed by science. The Science Mill in Johnson City pulls it all together in fun, dynamic setting. The brainchild of recent hill country resident, Dr. Bonnie Baskin, who took a 19th century granary and transformed it into a high-tech, hands-on hall of exhibits guaranteed to ignite the enthusiasm and curiosity of every visitor, meeting students of all ages on their terms with technology that brings life and transparency to key science concepts. Dr. Bonnie Baskin turned a neglected gristmill into a science museum in the Hill Country. Such vision!

E. Lee Walker Award for Collaboration –City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department / Cities Connecting Children in Nature (CCCN)

In March of 2016, after a national search among municipal leaders for the most innovative strategies for connecting kids to nature,-Austin was one of seven cities to be awarded the Cities Connecting Children to Nature Strategic Planning Grant. The Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) was tasked with leading a strategic planning process to explore how city leadership could help more children connect to nature, with a specific focus on equity. Over the course of 6 months, PARD brought together 75 representatives from 10 city departments including City Council and the Mayor's office, Austin Independent School District (AISD), and 40 nonprofit organizations to create a 3-year Implementation Plan. Short-term victories include the Austin Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights adopted in January by City Council; and the launch of a “Green School Parks” to green schoolyards and implement nature curriculum in areas of Austin with low nature equity and access. This project is the very definition of collaboration!

Westcave Award for Enduring Dedication – Jennifer L. Bristol, Texas Children in Nature

Jennifer Bristol is dedicated to connecting all Texas children and their families with nature. As a Park Ranger at Bastrop State Park, she worked to bring the community together through events, including a countywide National Trails Day event. In 2011, as Program Director of Camp Fire, she developed award winning conservation curriculum and outdoor skill programming that continues to connect children of all ages and their families with nature. Currently, as the Texas Children in Nature Coordinator, Jennifer works with over 375 partners around the state and in Central Texas to collaborate on projects, raise awareness and improve access to nature. Additionally she supports eight regional collaboratives who have served 3.1 million children in 2016 and acts as a conduit to share resources, information and ideas to help drive the Children in Nature movement forward. She has been a business owner and marketing director, but getting kids outside is her life-long endeavor of enduring dedication!

About the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin (CiNCA)

CiNCA is a core program of Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center and is a regional partnership among area nonprofits, environmental educators, health professionals, and a broad base of community leaders that is dedicated to nurturing a love of nature among children right here in Central Texas. Our programs include the Roadrunner Outdoor Adventure Bus that provides affordable transportation for schools and our partner organizations to use for nature-based field trips as well as regular gatherings among partners, support for new green spaces, partnership with AISD to normalize outdoor education for all children, and programs that greatly increase opportunities for kids to play and learn in nature. The benefits go far beyond developing future stewards for nature conservation. Research shows that children who spend time outside in nature are healthier, happier, and perform better academically. As CiNCA members, we believe in the power of nature to improve quality of life for kids that explore and feel confident in the nature.

About Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center

Founded in 1976 as Westcave Preserve, the mission of Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is to *inspire people to develop a lifelong practice of enjoying and protecting nature*. We accomplish this through educational programs, collaborative alliances, and conservation of our beautiful 76-acre preserve. Our preserve in southwest Travis County serves as an outdoor classroom for visitors to explore, discover and appreciate our extraordinary natural surroundings.

Media Contact:

Addie Broussard
Coordinator – Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin
addie@westcave.org
603 W. 13th Street, Suite 2D
Austin, TX 78701
512-276-2257 ext. 101

###