

HAPPY TRAILS

Centerville students buy golf cart to help those with limited mobility tour nature center

By Rachel E. Sheeley
Staff writer

CENTERVILLE, Ind. – Trails at the Cope Environmental Center that once might have been inaccessible to people with mobility problems are no longer an issue.

A special golf cart purchased for Cope by the Centerville High School Green Club will allow people with mobility problems to travel the trails with ease.

The Green Club started raising the money to buy the golf cart two years ago, said club adviser Kevin Smith, who teaches earth and space science and chemistry.

Cope asked the club if it would be interested in taking on the project because the center needed a golf cart. Smith thought the group of all girls wouldn't be interested, but they were.

"We took the project on because it was an environmentally sound project that would enable more people and intergenerational families to experience the natural environment together," Green Club member Tessa Pobanz said.

"It took two years, but it was worth it," Smith said. "They did a very nice job."

During the past two years, the club earned \$2,800 through bake sales, letter-writing campaigns, personal and business requests, and a grant from the Whitewater Valley REMC Trust.

"We made a lot of cookies and a lot of brownies," Smith said. "It was a really fun group to work with. I stood back and let them go. It was really kind of fun to watch.

"They learned that it's hard work to raise that kind of money, even if it is a good cause," Smith said. "I think they kept the big picture in mind and they didn't let that slow them down."

To Smith, one important aspect of the project was the students did it knowing it was solely to benefit others.

"They just got the intrinsic value of having done something for somebody else," Smith said.

"We all had a blast in doing this project. It's nice to be able to do something that will truly help members of the community," Green Club member Meghan Scales said.

In late April, the Cope board of directors accepted the keys to the refurbished golf cart from the club members.

"Without local support of our Centerville community and dedicated work by these students and teacher, this donation would not have been possible," said board chairman Ross Josephson.

With the golf cart, tours for people with limited mobility can be scheduled.

Dan "Bluegill" Fienning, a daily volunteer and Mr. Fix-It at Cope, will be the chief driver of the golf cart.

"I'm enthused about showing senior citizens what prevails on these beautiful Cope Environmental Center trails," Fienning said. "As a steady volunteer, it's my pleasure to be chosen 'chauffeur' of the 'Bat-Mobile' to drive through the premises."

Cope facilities and grounds manager Jeremy Mussoni said the golf cart also will make grounds maintenance easier. "Chipping trails and hauling materials will be a lot more efficient with the addition of the new cart," he said.

The next step in the project is to raise money for a solar panel to power the golf cart in a more environmentally friendly way.

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