



Nature Talks on Winterthur Walks

October 14, 2019



“The weather was perfect for a day trip and I was so impressed with what great artists we have among the youth,” boasted Aunt Marion Harmon, a great-grandmother from Immanuel Union United Methodist Church in Cheswold, reflecting on the citizen science training day at Winterthur Library and Gardens. The adventure began in the Brown Horticultural Learning Center where Jules Brook, nature illustrator and UDEL art instructor, shared hands on techniques designed to increase observation skills among Lenape Tribal Artists. The four Ridgeways participating were especially amazing with with the charcoal pencils. Before heading outside, Jon Cox, UDEL professor of Art and Design, encouraged photographers-in-training to document and upload their photos to I-Naturalist website as they notice nature’s changes. The young people assured him they are already on it!

The seven Tribal youth began their walking tour with Roger Mustalish, President of Amazon Center for Environmental Education and Research (ACEER), identifying indigenous plants along the way and describing the many ways early North Eastern Woodland people interacted with an incredibly wide variety of plant life before colonization. Mustalish also shared about his visit to Indigenous Peruvian medicine people and how they learn from plants, as though the plants explain themselves. He even demonstrated how some plants have the color or shape of the organ they affect. RuthAnn Purchase, Cultural Mapping Project Manager for the Lenape Indian Tribe, added, “The Lenape word for farmer, ehakihesak, is very similar to the word for musician, ehapikwesak, and translates . . . something like plant magician or plant whisperer, so there’s definitely something to listening differently and observing respectfully, in this ancient culture.”

JT Johnson, training for youth leadership and agriculture, said “I’m still deciding which Indigenous foods to grow. So I really appreciate Roger Mustalish talking us through each kind of landscape: the raised bed herb gardens, the forest walk, and the hillside meadow.” On the other hand, his brother, William Johnson stated, “I am not much of an outdoors guy, but I realize we have a lot to re-learn and I could see myself on the business end of this work.”

Deborah McNatt focused on recognizing healing plants and got some great photos of her cousin, Jamie Reynolds. Both are artists in their own right and eager learn how plants and people interact from an artists view-point. They are also eager to restore honor for Indigenous Foods and Jamie is currently designing a calendar teaching the Lenape name of Grandmother Moon’s cycles and the gifts of Tree People.

Hearing all their good reports, Chief Coker concluded, “It is great to see that parents, youth, and elementary school children are learning together again. It levels the playing field, but it also reassures us that no one is too old to learn the ancient ways. And no one is too young to be an encouragement to the Elders. Keeping the Seventh Generation in mind, brings all ages to work together for a healthy future. That was a great way to spend Indigenous People’s Day!”

