

# **Section 1**

**Welcome**

## **Welcome to Silver Lake Nature Center!**

We are so happy that you are interested in becoming a volunteer at Silver Lake Nature Center. Our goal is to enlighten the public about our environment and the wondrous beauty that is Silver Lake Nature Center. We do this through educational programs and special events and by day-to-day maintenance of our land and buildings that make the Center a must-see place for families, school groups, organizations, and any individuals who want to connect with their environment. This is where you come in. Our objective is ambitious, but the Center has a small staff. We depend on volunteers like you to help us succeed. Becoming a volunteer at the Center makes you a part of our team.

Once you have signed up to volunteer at the Center, you will learn all about the Center and its history and the many ways you can help spread the word about our environment and how our daily activities affect the very health of our planet. Through reading this handbook and our newsletters, as well as interacting with other volunteers, visitors, and staff members, your knowledge will grow. From keeping the grounds clean and safe to being educational assistants, from taking care of our resident animals to helping with our special events, there is a job for everyone!

Volunteering is also a great way to meet like-minded people. The Silver Lake Nature Center attracts a diverse group of volunteers who have an interest in the environment. During your time here, you will meet people who may have very different life experiences and many other interests. In meeting our staff and volunteers, we hope that you can learn a new skill, discover a new talent, find an interest in a new hobby, or find a new friend that will expand your horizon. We have a term that we use for this. We call it cross-pollination, and we hope that you are able to take advantage of all that being a volunteer at Silver Lake Nature Center has to offer. We hope that this Volunteer Handbook can be a guide for you as you start your work at the Center. You will be provided with specific information and training in relation to your position once a job has been decided based on your interests and the needs of the Center.

Again, welcome to the Center, and we all look forward to working with you in the future and hope that you find Silver Lake Nature Center to be rewarding and educational.

## **History of the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation, the Silver Lake Nature Center and the Friends of Silver Lake**

- 🦋 1955 Land is deeded to the County of Bucks from the PA Fish Commission.
- 🦋 1966 First Nature Center managed by George Carmichael (who still volunteers) during the summer seasons.
- 🦋 1972 Nature Center opens full time.
- 🦋 1974 A group of volunteers forms the Friends of Silver Lake (FOSL).
- 🦋 1978 FOSL is incorporated as a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting with the operation of the Center.
- 🦋 1982 FOSL hires their first staff person, Jean Carmichael, to assist the county staff with operating the building.
- 🦋 1990 FOSL hires their second staff person, part-time educator, Debbie Dennell.
- 🦋 1990 The Nature Conservancy transfers 94 acres of Delhaas Woods over to the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation for management as part of the Silver Lake Nature Center. The Nature Conservancy purchased the land to protect and preserve the many rare plants and rare habitats.
- 🦋 1991 The current Nature Center building is complete.

- 🦋 1991 The Nature Conservancy purchases from a private landowner and resells to the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation an additional 8 acres of the land.
- 🦋 1991 FOSL hires a coordinator of volunteers, a part-time position.
- 🦋 1994 The Nature Conservancy purchases from a private landowner and resells to the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation another 75 acres of land.
- 🦋 1995 FOSL hires their second full-time employee, an educator.
- 🦋 1998 FOSL hires another part time person to help with education, their fifth employee (County has 4 employees at the Center).
- 🦋 1998 The County purchases the old Fireside Tavern and the Palmer Container Repair plant for addition to the Park.
- 🦋 1999 The handicapped accessible trails are dedicated.
- 🦋 1999 The first phase of the EcoGarden is completed.
- 🦋 2001 Boardwalks into Delhaas Woods are completed.
- 🦋 2001 Butterfly Garden is completed.
- 🦋 2003 The Wildlife Observation Platform is completed.
- 🦋 2004 Old nature center is building renovated to house interns.

### **Silver Lake Nature Center's Vision Statement**

The Silver Lake Nature Center will be widely known for our local leadership in environmental education, watershed preservation and environmental protection. We will be recognized in our community as friendly and inviting, providing a range of educational and environmentally-oriented recreational programs that serve all people.

### **Silver Lake Nature Center's Mission Statement**

The Silver Lake Nature Center creates opportunities for the natural habitats of Silver Lake to inspire students of all ages and abilities with the wonder and beauty of this living treasure. Through education, recreation, research and advocacy, we attract new friends and supporters to Silver Lake and its watershed, and together preserve this priceless heritage for generations to come.

### **What is Silver Lake Nature Center**

The Silver Lake Nature Center (SLNC) is a facility of the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation with additional funding and staffing provided by the Friends of Silver Lake Nature Center. The Silver Lake Nature Center, where learning comes naturally, is a 235-acre nature preserve located in Bristol Township, Bucks County. The lake is the terminus of the Mill Creek, Queen Anne Creek and the Black Ditch Creek Watershed. The grounds have about 4.5 miles of Nature Trails that are routed through or near the various habitats. The Grounds are maintained by a combination of county employees and volunteers to enhance the diversity of plant and animal life. The habitats include: Coastal Plain Forest, Lake, Marshes, Fields, Wet Meadows, and an Unglaciaded Bog. Protected within the park are 44 Pennsylvania Species of Special Concern. Silver Lake provides refuge for the Redbelly Turtle, while the marsh is home for the Coastal Plain Leopard Frog. Maryland Meadow Beauties, Atlantic Blue-eyed Grass, Umbrella Magnolia, Sweetbay Magnolia and American Holly are some of the showier, unusual plants.

The management of the Center is by professional naturalists, whose functions are to understand and interpret this piece of land; to coordinate County and outside resources to most efficiently provide a clean, safe, diverse, enjoyable and educational facility; and to develop activities for the public without discrimination. Trained staff funded either by the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation or the Friends of Silver Lake Nature Center assists the Director-Naturalist.

### **Function of the Silver Lake Nature Center**

In an effort to serve the stated purpose, Silver Lake Nature Center offers the following opportunities:

- 1) Educational sessions for children, adults, families, school classes, senior citizen organizations, scout groups and civic organizations on wide ranging topics
- 2) Off-site activities such as field trips, outdoor recreation programs, workshops, and group lectures
- 3) Mutual cooperation with other scientific and environmental organizations like Bucks County Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Philadelphia Zoological Society, PA Department of Environmental Resources, PA Fish Commission, Association of Conservation Executives, Pennsylvania Alliance for Environmental Education, Association of Nature Center Administrators, and other nature centers in and out of Bucks County
- 4) Consultation and advisory services to the general public
- 5) Volunteer opportunities to assist the staff with operation and maintenance of the Center and the Park, public awareness of the Center, the Park and the programs provided, and fund raising
- 6) Opportunities for the general public to explore the grounds and building during scheduled park hours

### **The Difference Between Silver Lake Nature Center (SLNC) and the Friends of Silver Lake (FOSL)**

Since both organizations are working simultaneously in the same space, it is frequently difficult for the public, staff, volunteers and board to recognize that various functions are being served by the separate organizations.

The Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation owns the Silver Lake Nature Center and

- ✎ Pays 2 full-time staff plus a Saturday and Sunday staff person to administer the facility and programs. The Center's Director-Naturalist supervises all staff of the County and FOSL.
- ✎ Co-sponsors all the educational activities.
- ✎ Pays for the utilities – phones, electric, water/sewer and postage.
- ✎ Provides maintenance support for the building and grounds.

The Friends of Silver Lake is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to assisting the Center with providing quality programs to the community. It is set up to

- ✎ Pay 1 full time administrator, 1 part-time bookkeeper, 1 part-time educator, 1 part-time coordinator of volunteers, plus education staff to teach programs as needed.
- ✎ Co-sponsor all of the educational programs.
- ✎ Promote the programs to the members and general public.
- ✎ Provide administrative staff to support the needs of both organizations.
- ✎ Provide for a staff person dedicated to the coordination of the volunteers.
- ✎ Conduct most of the educational programming.
- ✎ Assist with fundraising and capital project development.
- ✎ Give the organization direction, primarily through a Board of community members.

### **Who's Who at Silver Lake Nature Center**

Robert Mercer – Director/Naturalist, County

Lorraine Skala – Assistant Director/Naturalist, County

Carolyn Girgenti – Administrative Assistant, Friends

PattiAnn Lynn –Environmental Educator and Marketing, County and Friends

Jennifer Bilger – Coordinator of Volunteers and Summer Camp Director, Friends

Peg Mongillo – Bookkeeper, Friends

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## **Section 2**

# **About the Volunteer Program At Silver Lake Nature Center**

## **Goals of the Silver Lake Nature Center Volunteer Program**

- 🐾 To assist the staff in establishing Silver Lake Nature Center as a friendly and inviting place by acting in a professional and welcoming manner towards all of our visitors
- 🐾 To increase the community's awareness of Silver Lake Nature Center, its mission and programs
- 🐾 To assist staff in providing services to our visitors that would not be possible without our volunteers
- 🐾 To expand our volunteers' knowledge and awareness about environmental matters, locally and globally
- 🐾 To inspire our volunteers to conserve, preserve and restore the natural treasure here at Silver Lake Nature Center and in their own communities

## **Benefits of Being a SLNC Volunteer**

- 🐾 Have the opportunity to expand your knowledge and learn new talents
- 🐾 Have the satisfaction of knowing that you are making a difference at Silver Lake Nature Center, in the community and in the world
- 🐾 Earn Community Service hours for high school and/or college
- 🐾 Make social and professional contacts
- 🐾 Receive references after 3 months or 50 hours of satisfactory service
- 🐾 Receive an invitation to our annual Volunteer Recognition Event in March where volunteers are recognized for: hours and years of service
- 🐾 Receive invitations to various volunteer social events throughout the year, like potluck events and volunteer development

## **Your Rights and Responsibilities as a SLNC Volunteer**

### **As a Volunteer, you can expect:**

- 🐾 To be respected as an individual by the staff and other volunteers.
- 🐾 To be appreciated for your work and recognized when you go above and beyond.
- 🐾 To receive adequate training so that you can perform your job confidently.
- 🐾 To be listened to when you have a question or concern.
- 🐾 A positive work environment.

### **As a Volunteer, you are responsible for:**

- 🐾 Being professional and respectful to the staff, other volunteers and our visitors.
- 🐾 Completing all necessary training materials for your job and asking questions when something is unclear.
- 🐾 Performing your job to the best of your ability and asking for additional assistance when you need it.
- 🐾 Being dependable and trustworthy.
- 🐾 Treating others as you would like to be treated.
- 🐾 Following all policies as outlined in this handbook.

## Volunteer Policies

**Animal and/or Plant Donations:** It is **NOT** the policy of Silver Lake Nature Center to accept wild animals, plants, or unwanted pets. This is to protect the animals and habitats within the Center from non-native animals and diseases. The staff is not trained and the Center is neither licensed nor equipped to handle injured or abandoned wildlife. If a visitor attempts to bring an animal into the Center or wants to release an animal on the grounds, remind him/her that we cannot allow this for the safety of the other animals. Offer him/her the numbers of three different wildlife rehabilitation facilities listed below. These number are posted in the store and the office, and many of the staff have this information readily available at their desks.

**AARK**  
**1531 Upper Stump Rd**  
**Chalfont, PA 18914-1715**  
**215.249.1938**

**Schuylkill Center for Wildlife**  
**Port Royal Ave. Philadelphia, PA 19128**  
**215.482.8217**

**Mercer County Wildlife Center @ Titusville, NJ.**  
*(this one is the closest to SLNC, about 25 minutes away) 609.883.6606*

**Attendance:** SLNC heavily depends on our volunteers to assist with tasks and programs that would not be possible without you. For many jobs, you will be reporting to a particular staff member who is coordinating the event. If this is not the case, you will be reporting to the Coordinator of Volunteers. Therefore, we ask that if you are scheduled but are not able to make it or will be late, you let the appropriate staff member know. Volunteers who do not show up for their scheduled times without informing the coordinating staff member risk losing their position at SLNC. **Each time you are at the Center to volunteer, you will be asked to sign in when you arrive and sign out before you leave. This form is kept in the library office near the Coordinator of Volunteer's desk.** This is important, as the county requires a monthly report outlining the involvement of the community through volunteerism, and every hour counts.

**Becoming a Volunteer:** Those interested in becoming a SLNC Volunteer should contact the Coordinator of Volunteers at 215-785-1177 extension #14 or by stopping in the office. They will then receive the Volunteer Information Packet, which includes the volunteer handbook and application. Once the information is completed, it should be returned to the Coordinator of Volunteers and an interview will be scheduled so the potential volunteer and the coordinator can meet. This will assist in the decision of whether SLNC is a suitable place for the volunteer and, if so, where the volunteer will be placed based on the interests and abilities of the volunteer and the needs of SLNC. A training session will then be scheduled so that the volunteer can learn the mission of SLNC, its history, receive training for his/her assigned job and have any questions answered. At this time, the volunteer will also receive his/her work schedule.

**Change in Status:** We are aware that our volunteers have busy lives and other commitments and that circumstances may change that affect your ability to volunteer. If other commitments prevent you

from being able to continue your position as a volunteer, we ask that you inform the Coordinator of Volunteers either in person or with a brief letter explaining why you are leaving. You will then be placed in the Inactive Volunteers File for 2 years. If you are able to return to your volunteer position within that time, inform the Coordinator of Volunteers, and your file will be updated. If it has been more than 2 years since your change in status, you will be asked to complete another application.

**Dependability:** Many of the programs and events that SLNC offers to the community would not be possible without our volunteers. This is why we view dependability as a responsibility. Becoming a SLNC Volunteer means that you accept the responsibility to be dependable. There may be times when you are the only volunteer scheduled with a staff member for an event or program, so that staff member is depending on you to be at the right place at the right time so the event/program can proceed and run smoothly.

**Dismissal:** It is SLNC's vision to be seen as a friendly and inviting place of environmental education and recreation; therefore, we expect our volunteers to be professional and friendly to our visitors.

Volunteers may be terminated for the following reasons:

- 🐾 Continual lateness and/or absence without notice
- 🐾 Being disrespectful of the staff, other volunteers or our visitors
- 🐾 Abuse or mistreatment of the animals at SLNC including those in our exhibits and those that call the land at the Center home
- 🐾 Destruction of property, including that of staff, volunteers or visitors, or the deliberate destruction of any habitat at the Center
- 🐾 Stealing from the Center, staff, volunteers or visitors
- 🐾 Harassment or discrimination towards staff, volunteers or visitors
- 🐾 Use of alcohol or illegal drugs while volunteering
- 🐾 Violating any state, federal or local laws while volunteering
  - Certain offenses that are committed while not volunteering may also be grounds for dismissal, such as child abuse

**Dress Code:** Volunteers are asked to dress neatly yet appropriately for your assigned job. Please keep in mind that the nature of your job will determine what you wear. You are asked not to wear clothing that may be offensive to others, as you will be representing SLNC to our visitors.

**Inclement Weather:** Since much of what happens at the Center is weather dependent, during inclement weather, we ask that you use your own judgment on whether or not to come in. If you do not feel safe coming to the Center, don't come in. We ask that you call to let us know. If nobody is in the office, you will get the phone service and can leave a message so we are aware that you will not be in.

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** It is the policy of Silver Lake Nature Center, as stated in the County of Bucks Human Resources' Policies for All County Employees, to ensure equal opportunity without discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, citizenship or any other characteristic protected by law. Volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any such discrimination or harassment.

**Disability Policy:** SLNC does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its programs, activities, or facilities. We welcome volunteers with disabilities and will work with you to the best of our ability to place you in a suitable position. People with special needs are asked to give advance notice.



**Problems:** Volunteers are asked to report any problems that may occur throughout the Center and the grounds. This includes but is not limited to:

- 🐾 Animals that are dead, injured or acting in an unusual manner
- 🐾 Inappropriate or suspicious behavior by visitors, groups or other volunteers
- 🐾 Water, smoke, fire or excessive heat or cold inside the building
- 🐾 Smoke or fire on the grounds of the Center
- 🐾 Any other safety hazards

Please remember that your safety is important, so use caution when surveying a potentially dangerous situation. Do not approach animals that are injured or acting unusual. We also ask that you report suspicious behavior by others and not confront the individual(s) on your own. Please use your best judgment when investigating safety hazards.

**Professionalism:** In keeping with SLNC's vision, we ask our volunteers to represent the Center as friendly and inviting to all; therefore, you are asked to act in a professional manner towards our visitors and other volunteers. Volunteers should refrain from inappropriate language and behavior, as well as maintain a cleanly appearance and wear appropriate attire.

**Promptness:** All volunteers are asked to be prompt when reporting for your shift. Staff members and other volunteers depend on you either to relieve them from their shift or to start a time-sensitive project or task.

**Publicity:** Anyone interested in writing an article about SLNC or one of its programs/events for a publication or news media is asked to consult either the Director, the coordinating staff member for that program/event, or the marketing coordinator so that the information is presented accurately to the public.

**Questions, Comments and Concerns:** If at anytime you have a question, comment or concern, it is your responsibility to bring this to our attention. Your comments and concerns are important to us and can help us make things better for our volunteers and visitors. Questions are always welcome, and remember, the only stupid question is the one that does not get asked.

**Recording Hours:** Each month the County of Bucks requires a report of how many volunteers and volunteer hours we had. This helps with funding and grants that SLNC depends on. To accurately record this vital information, each time you come to the Center to volunteer you will be required to sign in at the office when you arrive and sign out before you leave. Signing in before you start is also important in case of an emergency. If there is a fire in the building, we need to know that everyone has gotten out safely. If you do not sign in, we would have no way of knowing that you may still be in the building. The same is true of signing out so that we know that you have gone home and are not in danger. **It is your responsibility to make sure that your hours are recorded properly each time you are here. If you need help signing in and out, the Coordinator of Volunteers can show you the proper procedure, but it is up to you, not the staff or other volunteers, to make sure that this gets done.**

**References:** Volunteers can receive references after either three months or fifty hours of satisfactory service. Please remember that references are a privilege, not a right. If you would like a written reference, please be sure to give at least two weeks' notice and have the name, title and business address of the person the letter should be mailed to and what the reference is for.

**Smoking:** The building at SLNC is a smoke-free building. Volunteers who smoke are required to do so outside, away from the building. **Please dispose of the filters in a garbage container and not on the ground.**

**Substance Abuse:** Alcohol and illegal drug use by volunteers while they are on duty will not be tolerated. Any volunteer under the influence while on duty will be recommended for dismissal.

**Supervision:** Volunteers will usually report to the Coordinator of Volunteers. For certain programs or events, you may be assigned to a specific staff member who is coordinating the program or event. This person is known as the coordinating staff member, and you will report to him/her until your project or task is complete.

**Time Commitment:** Each volunteer job has its own time commitment. You will have the opportunity to be a 1-time project volunteer or an ongoing volunteer. Volunteers who choose the 1-time project may work just one day, or many days, but just until a particular project is completed. Work that fits this description may include:

- 🐾 Work keeping grounds, trails, habitats in shape
- 🐾 Work keeping the building repaired, clean and nice looking
- 🐾 Planning, designing, maintaining or constructing within the building or landscape features
- 🐾 Working at an event or program
- 🐾 Assisting with a mailing

Volunteers who choose to become an ongoing or active volunteer will be given a job assignment and training. This includes but is not limited to:

- 🐾 Gardener
- 🐾 Storekeeper
- 🐾 Office Assistant
- 🐾 Special Events Assistant

For more volunteer jobs and descriptions, please see Section 3 of the Handbook.

**Training Classes:** All volunteers are encouraged to attend any educational or training sessions set up as volunteer development.

**Weapons:** Guns and other weapons are not permitted at SLNC. We are aware that some volunteer jobs require the use of dangerous items that may be considered a weapon, such as a saw or knife. These items will be supplied only to mature, able volunteers by the Center when appropriate and must be returned before you leave the Center.

**Workplace Violence:** Silver Lake Nature Center does not tolerate violence. Violence can include written, spoken or perceived threats or acts of violence. Volunteers who are aware of any violence by visitors or other volunteers should report this immediately to a staff member. Never put yourself in harms way by confronting the person or people. Volunteers who participate in any kind of violence while on duty will be recommended for dismissal.