

Trout Talk

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She's a natural... ist
Page 3

"Master naturalist of Bennett Spring"
by Chris Roden

SEPTEMBER 2022

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Master naturalist of Bennett Spring

BY CHRIS RODEN FOR THE LCR

Visitors may or may not have seen Holly Welch in the Nature

Center at Bennett Spring State Park. She is little bit like the bears that occasionally pass through the park.



LCR Photo/Chris Roden

For Holly Welch, the best part of her job is being outside in what many believe is one of Missouri's best trout fishing parks.

"I try to stay out of the lime light," Welch said.

However, she foiled her own plan for obscurity by recently winning an award, the Masterpiece Award for being the Seasonal Employee of the Year for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Noted as one of her accomplishments was a historical video about the area that became Bennett Spring State Park.

Patricia Chambers, senior naturalist resource interpreter for the park, nominated her, describing her as "a great team player with a very positive attitude."

Her official title is very non-descript: seasonal worker. However, she thinks of herself as a seasonal interpreter because of the programs and camps she helps Chambers put on throughout the year.

Some of the programs include activities like sunrise hikes along the Savanna Ridge Trail and demonstrations on how to repurpose items that would otherwise be thrown away.

As a seasonal worker, Welch is allotted 1,000 hours, which some workers use up in the more active periods at the park. However, she works three days a week year round. June is a very busy month because of all the camps happening in the park.

Wintertime work consists of the "behind the scenes" tasks

like taking inventory and vacuuming the taxidermy, including the stuffed otter and badger inside and more fire line work and prescribed burns outside.

"We do more outside work because we don't have to be here (in the Nature Center) as much," Welch said.

Marking the fire lines in the warmer months has a natural consequence.

"We're going to get covered in ticks," Welch said.

She can visit schools for presentations in this slow time as well. However, the freshly vacuumed examples of nature generally do not make the trip with the exception of the occasional owl.

A trunk devoted to bear-related items and another trunk with a variety of animal furs get to travel more often.

Although she grew up as "a city kid," the family went on hikes that whetted her appetite for the outdoors, trekking the Abbott and Rockwood Reservation trails as well as at Babler State Park and Queeny Park.

The St. Louis native attended Mizzou and majored in parks and recreation with an emphasis in natural recreation and resource management.

"I knew I didn't want to work in the office all day, and I liked being outside," Welch said.

See 'NATURALIST' / page 4

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LCR Photo/Chris Roden
Trail maintenance is one of Welch's outdoor tasks, whether it is trimming back the foliage to make hikes more enjoyable or filling in the eroded portions with gravel.

Naturalist _____ from page 3

"I started out in wildlife management and thought I didn't want to do all the scientific stuff, so I found parks and recreation

and thought that was a better fit." For two years after graduation, she worked in municipal government in both Kirkwood and

Chesterfield in their parks and recreation departments. It led her to a conclusion.

"I decided I wanted to be more outside than that. I didn't want to just sit in recreation centers and put on programs. I wanted

to work more outside with nature and nature-related themes," Welch said.

She found that at Bennett Spring State Park.

See 'NATURALIST' / page 5

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Naturalist

from page 4

She and her husband, Jim, moved to Bolivar after two years in Des Moines and a job transfer.

Before she was hired at the park in 2019, she was a devoted stay at home mom for her sons, Caleb, 19, and Ethan, 17.

"I wanted to stay home and raise kids. I made it into a complete job. I made it work for me," Welch said.

But now since her kids are nearly out of the house, it is time for a change of focus.

"My kids are about out of school, and I always said I would be around for them and their activities, which is why I've kept it at a part-time basis. When my youngest one graduates, I will be looking for a full-time job. I'd like to stay with the parks, but if it doesn't work out, I'll go where there's a job," Welch said.

In 2015 with an eye to a future sans children at home, she became

a master naturalist.

"It's a volunteer organization, sponsored by both the Department of Conservation and the University of Missouri Extension. You have to go through so many hours of training, and each year, you have to volunteer 40 hours and continue to get education," Welch said.

The program put Welch in her favorite locale, in nature, and allows her to do more of the same type of work she does at the Nature Center.

Being a master naturalist will make her more employable. In fact, volunteering is what helped her get a job at the Nature Center.

"I was volunteering here to put on a program, and I was talking to Patty and she was like 'Why don't you just apply and work here?'" Welch said.

Her drive from home to the park is almost an hour long.

See 'NATURALIST' / page 6



LCR Photo/Chris Roden

Holly Welch watches as Amanda Belew and Raylen Reeder, 6, make use of the Nature Center's museum as learning center.

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Naturalist

from page 5

"It's a long drive, but it's kind of nice just to chill out," Welch said.

And the job was a great fit for Welch worth the drive.

"I enjoy what I'm doing. I like the variety. I like being able to work outside on resource management, work in here and put on programs for kids and create displays and make stuff like that," Welch said.

Her love of the outdoors followed her into the Nature Center. Overhead in the Nature Center's museum are some familiar sights in the park.

"I made the clouds and the vultures in the sky," Welch said.

The "clouds" are cotton ball clusters encircling the lights. The vultures are painted on the ceiling tiles against a blue sky.

"I get to use my creative side, but I can also be outside, walk on trails and do trail management," Welch said.

Trail management includes evaluating the trail for what needs upkeep, helping to remove fallen trees, pruning along the sides of the trail and erosion control and prevention.

"We've been putting rocks on one of the trails the past few days because of the huge amounts of rain we've had," Welch said.

So her job is a interesting mix of indoor and outdoor work that avoids the sedentary lifestyle that eventually harms one's health.

She does not have a favorite part of her job.

"I like the fact that I can put on programs for kids and see the wow factor as they haven't made before or maybe they're more comfortable with something in nature that they hadn't been before," Welch said.

Her least favorite part is, of course, the ticks.

See 'NATURALIST' / page 7



LCR Photo/Chris Roden

One of Welch's creative outlets is helping guests to the Nature Center understand that even when recycling they can be creative like she was when she decorated the recycling bin with plastic bottles.

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LCR Photo/Chris Roden

Welch looks for useful information for one of her many programs she presents at the Nature Center. She began working there in 2019.

Naturalist _____ from page 6

She sees herself staying with the parks or a similar agency depending on which positions become available.

She has seen some of the other Missouri parks and plans to visit the rest, including something of a scouting trip with Chambers to see what those parks have to offer that can be brought back to Bennett.

"All the parks have a different feel," Welch said.

"I've been to Montauk, Roaring River, this one. They are a little bit different."

For now though, she is content to be a seasonal interpreter of the natural world that she loves so much in the confines of Bennett Spring State Park where even her indoor work is all about the outdoors.

"They seem to like what I do, and they give me the freedom to be creative, to do what I need to do to get the job done," she added.

"It's a mutual understanding. They'll get my best, and in return they give me

some freedoms."

Even so, for Holly Welch, her job does cause some disbelief.

"I can't believe they pay me to be out here, to walk on trails, to be out in the great outdoors."



LCR Photo/Chris Roden

If one looks up in the Nature Center's museum, one sees a representation where Holly Welch wants to be during her working day. She encircled the lights with cotton clouds and painted buzzards and blue sky on the ceiling. Buzzards as well as bald eagles are common sights at Bennett.

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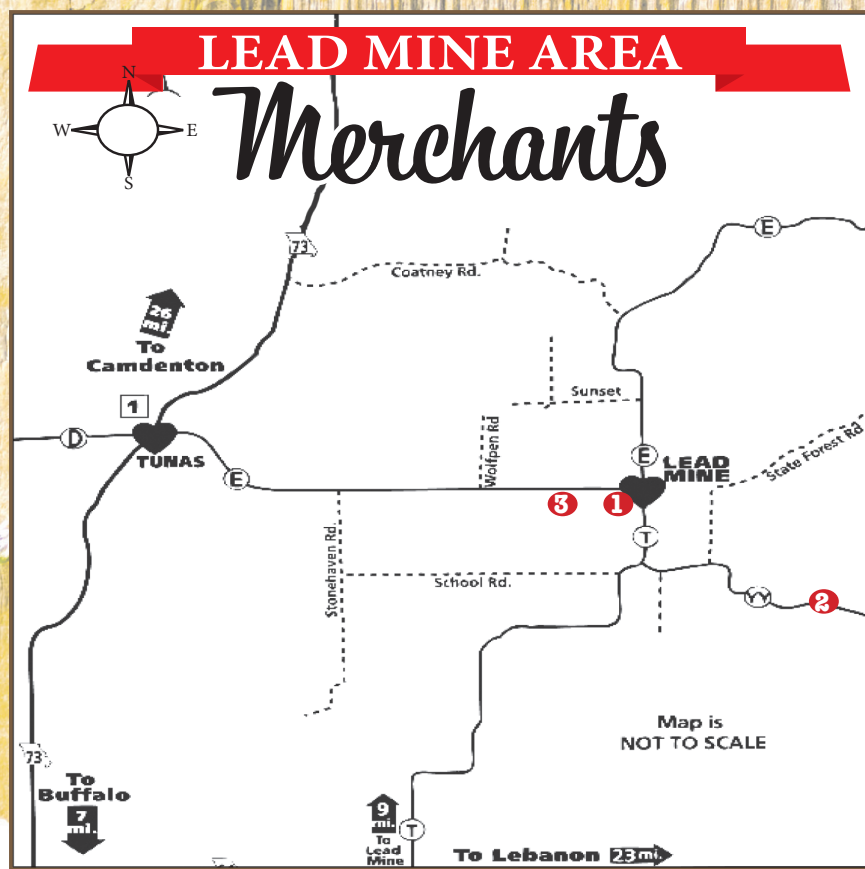
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Contributed photo

Charlie, pictured left front age 5, and Mason, right front age 7, commemorated their fishing fun at Bennett Spring with a family photo.

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Get in the zone

A look at Bennett Spring State Park rules and regulations:

FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures. Permits are available at the park store. For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery

dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited, even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

Park hours

Trout Fishing Hours

July: 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

August: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily

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Pics and tips from the park



Contributed photo

Anglers of all ages enjoyed a free back to school fishing event Saturday, Aug. 20. Pictured is one of the younger participants of the day with her stringers.



LCR Photo/Chris Roden

PARK TIP: Each of the three zones at Bennett Spring State Park allow for different types of baits, lures and flies. Please see page 11 for a full list of rules and regulations.



Contributed photo

PARK TIP: Bennett Spring State Park reminds visitors and anglers of the importance of removing fishing line from trees. Last week, a Ranger removed a fly from this bat's mouth near the spring. The bat was hung up in the line from a tree. Please use caution when fishing and always remove fishing line from trees!



Contributed photos

Pictured left, Kelly Kaiser holds a 3.4 lb catch off a homemade jig from Zone 2. Above, Jim Reinhardt holds the 3 lb Crackleback he caught from Zone 1. To the right, Jamie Price-Eckenroth, from Los Angeles, CA, caught this 3.5 lb off a worm in Zone 3.



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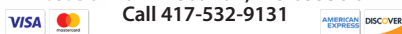
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Trout Talk

BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA





Contributed photo
Roger Halbrook reeled in this 4 lb 2 oz catch in Zone 1 with a White Marabou jig.



Contributed photo
Alane Price secured this 3 lb trout using a shrimp as bait in Zone 3.



Contributed photo
Remington, age 9, is all smiles holding his catches from Zone 3.



Contributed photo
Generations shared their love for the sport at Bennett Spring State Park this summer.



Contributed photos
Left, Rayleigh (Age 11) picked up this lunker in Zone1 during her visit to Bennett Spring State Park. Pictured right, Harry Bresler is photographed with a 3 lb Crackleback which was harvested from Zone 2 of the state park.



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