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## Utah Botanical Center brings kids out of the classroom into learning

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Kaysville - A good teacher knows how to fool kids or adults into learning.

Utah Botanical Center instructor Annette Ward said as much as she mixed up a batch of dough for a "Slimy, Goopy, Gross" class for 4- to 7-year-old students.

"We're teaching science about gases, yeasts, densities and layering," she said. "It's a hands-on fun experience, not like school."

The mission of the 100-acre center and its adjacent 80-acre experimental farm, run by the Utah State University Extension Service, is to promote conservation through education, research and technology. Educators at the center use the Utah House and surrounding ponds, wetlands and experimental gardens to help thousands of northern Utah students and adults learn how to save water and energy.

This fall, the facility will get a new tool in its mission when the \$1.5 million Wetland Discovery Point classroom opens on the edge of the ponds and wetlands adjacent to Interstate 15. Boardwalks leading from the center into the wetlands will be built soon.

"We felt strongly that we needed to provide the opportunity for people to have access to the water," said Botanical Center director Dave Anderson. "We have the ponds here, and we want to take advantage of them to teach people about the bigger picture."

One idea is to use the small wetlands as a starting point to educate kids and adults, who then can explore the larger and higher-quality wetlands three miles west of the center along the eastern shore of the Great Salt Lake.

Such educational possibilities interested the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission, which helped provide funding. Commission director Michael Weland said the botanical center brings many environmental principles together in a single place.

"You have the Utah House, native-plant demonstration gardens combined with water and energy conservation, connections to wildlife, fishing and wetlands," he said. "This is representative of how to reach people who live along the Wasatch Front. Eventually, all things come together and a river runs through it."

Indeed, Anderson and his staff are building an artificial stream that will flow from the experimental garden into the ponds to allow more focus on riparian zones and their value.

"We are teaching the whole idea of a sense of place," said Anderson. "What does it mean to live in a high mountain desert environment?"

The Utah House, in operation for several years, draws about 10,000 people a year interested in learning techniques that save energy and water. For example, rainwater that falls on its roof is collected in a submerged storage tank on the property and then used to water mostly native plants.

Visitors can learn how to apply such lessons in their own homes.

Similar techniques were used in building the new Wetland Discovery Point classroom, which features solar panels and composting toilets to save energy and water. The new building will also increase capacity for field trips from 4,000 to between 8,000 and 10,000 students.

For now, the public facility not only educates but has become a valuable urban wildlife area where visitors can

see different species of birds and where Davis County residents can fish in ponds for largemouth bass, catfish, bluegill and trout.

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