



Artist's sketch of the envisioned Fredericksburg Nature Center at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park Trail. — Image courtesy SKT Architects and Dunaway

# Fredericksburg Nature Center: A vision worth growing

**By Lonnie Childs**  
President, Friends  
of Fredericksburg  
Nature Center

In 2000, our founder, the late Bill Lindemann, went in search of a site to establish a bird watching venue. He discovered an untouched tract in the corner of Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, straddling Live Oak Creek, that could not be conventionally developed, but which, to his trained eye, manifested great species biodiversity nestled in seven distinct natural habitats.

Bill's expertise and imagination enabled him to envision a nature center where the community and visitors could be educated about our precious Hill Country natural resources. A vision was born, and the idea of the Fredericksburg Nature Center (FNC) came into being.

After gaining approval from the City of Fredericksburg, a non-profit organization was created, the Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center (FFNC), focused on recruiting volunteers and raising funds to fulfill the vision.

The FFNC mission statement defines our purpose as "Promoting the preservation of our Texas Hill Country ecosystems through education and experiences."

Over the past 24 years, in furtherance of that mission, a dedicated volunteer force has installed over one mile of hiking trails, two pollinator gardens, a geology exhibit, cactus garden, bird blind, and educational signage that enhances the visitor's experience at the nature center.

In pursuit of our educational objectives, FFNC has conducted numerous workshops, hosted over 3,000 FUSD third graders, sponsored nature festivals, held children's educational events, and hosted approximately 3,800 visitors in the past year.

While adult education remains important, our

greatest priority is to instill in our youth an understanding and love for nature as we pursue our vision, "To create a community of Land Stewards to protect our natural resources into the future."

**Our imperative.** Although we live in a rural environment surrounded by undeveloped land, many of our children suffer from a lack of access to neighborhood parks, trails and undeveloped wild lands. To compound the issue, they are distracted by modern technology that usually involves engagement with a screen.

Statistics reveal that children spend an average of 44 hours per week engaged with a screen with only an average of 10 minutes daily spent outside.

Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods," who conceived the concept of "nature deficit disorder," notes "the shift in our relationship with nature is startling ... and that for the new generations, nature is more abstraction than reality." Our primordial connection to nature may become only a fading memory lost to future generations.

How do we reverse the trend? The Texas Partnership for Children in Nature advocates that we must increase the "environmental literacy" of our children, defined as "the knowledge, skills, and ability to understand, analyze, and address major natural resource opportunities and challenges."

Would anyone argue that these "opportunities and challenges" are already evident and only growing? Texas even has a law, the 2009 No Child Left Inside Act, which calls for "every child to be engaged in meaningful outdoor learning experiences and achieve natural resource literacy." Of course, this mandate was not funded in our public schools, but who can argue with the intent?

**It's time.** In pondering how FNC could better address this growing challenge, it

became evident that the time had arrived to fulfill a longstanding objective to construct an Interpretive Center.

The facility would enable an expanded environmental education program and provide greater experiential opportunities to interact with nature. FFNC had steadily been implementing Bill's original vision over the last two decades, but times called for transformative action to accelerate the growth of his vision.

In partnership with the City of Fredericksburg Parks and Recreation Department, FFNC has developed a plan to construct an Interpretive Center campus and implement an expanded educational program supported by professional staff.

Over the past two years, the FFNC Advisory Council, composed of community stakeholders, solicited input from the community and visited a dozen area nature centers resulting in the development of a scope statement that defines the function and features of the future center.

We have teamed with SKT Architects, Dunaway, Clarke Design, and Guido Construction as partners in the fulfillment of our expanded vision.

In May 2024, the City Council approved our Development Agreement allowing FFNC to move forward with the plan.

**A walk in the future.** Today, as you drive into Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, glance to the left and you will see an open area, a blank canvas if you will, awaiting the painting of our future Interpretive Center. On that canvas, imagine an appealing building reflecting our natural heritage built of materials that integrate with the natural surroundings.

The facility is enveloped by native gardens intersected by winding paths that lead you to an outdoor learning pavilion where you hear laughter and delight in the sight of children learning

about the wondrous migration of Monarch butterflies.

Nearby, more children are eagerly playing in a natural playscape of logs, stumps, and a tunnel composed of natural materials that provide a tactile experience with nature. Past that, you notice a family birdwatching at the Bird Blind as another family hikes down the Live Oak Trail.

Now venture back to explore the beckoning Interpretive Center building. Entering a foyer staffed by a helpful docent, they provide information about the center and inform you that tomorrow night will feature a lecture on Horned Lizards.

Wandering into the Exhibit Hall, you are awed by the innovative exhibits covering an array of topics designed to interest both children and adults. Peek into the Learning and Event Center where tomorrow's lecture will be held, and you see a youth group in a screened-off corner discussing their science project involving the nature center.

Glancing out the back windows with a view into the wild motivates you to walk out onto the inviting covered porch. Take a seat for some peaceful repose, appreciate the vista, and wish that you could sit here all day. You notice more interesting exhibits on the porch, and nearby, green building features, including a water collection tank and solar panels.

Thoughtfully surveying the surroundings, you observe a community of all ages immersed in nature-based experiences, exploring nature's wonders and mysteries, rediscovering our primeval connection, and becoming invested in a commitment to preserve our Texas natural heritage.

The awareness comes easily that this is a vision worth growing.

Support A Vision Worth Growing campaign by emailing Lonnie Childs at [lonniechilds@utexas.edu](mailto:lonniechilds@utexas.edu) or visiting <https://fredericksburgnature-center.com>.