

*Raven Hill Discovery Center, incorporated in 1991, is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.*

**Mission:** Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

To: Friends and Family everywhere  
From: Cheri and Raven Hill  
Date: September 18, 2021  
Re: In the beginning

This is one of many Raven Hill backstories! In November of 1991, a standard 40'x 60' pole barn with cement floor was constructed on the west side of Fuller Road. That building became Raven Hill Discovery Center, officially opening for visitors on May 3, 1992. Long before the magnet table and marimba became the first two hands-on "exhibits" at Raven Hill, the interior of the building was completed with great attention to detail.

Here's how it happened! After the interior walls were up, Tim Leach, Raven Hill co-founder, began to work on the floor. He started by laying a 2"x4" & plywood subfloor throughout the building. Over winter break, our plan was to start laying a hardwood floor, featuring both northern Michigan and exotic hardwoods. With a list of woods in hand, we set out for Traverse City to get flooring at Rare Earth Hardwoods. The timing was perfect! Rare Earth was doing their year-end inventory and were happy to sell their odd lots of flooring instead of having to inventory them all. Fortunately, Raven Hill's wish came true and the floor includes sixteen different hardwoods. All the light-colored "background" woods are from northern Michigan and include oak, sugar maple, red maple, curly maple, ash, beech, birch, gray birch and elm. The dark inlaid pattern is fashioned from selectively-cut exotic hardwoods: Brazilian cherry, Brazilian walnut, rosewood, purple heart, zebra wood, ebony and satinwood. Before he started working on the floor, Tim spread out the wood, so he could look through the piles of flooring and find the right piece to match grains across the span of the room. Today, you may come across wood burned numbers on some of the floor boards. Each of the different types of wood in the floor is numbered for identification. One of these days, we'll get around to creating an exhibit with a sample of each of the woods identified for visitors.

After the wood floor was done, Tim and his dad, Richard Leach, Albion College Art Professor, fashioned a "cookie cutter" and made hexagonal blue tiles, which can be found in one of the bathrooms and on two door ramps. The Animal Room counter is tiled with the same blue tiles. All the tiles were made on site and contain some Ellsworth clay, making them truly local. Next, Tim laid Idaho flagstone in what was the original entryway to Raven Hill. He also created two fieldstone planters currently filled with orphaned plants that bring a touch of green to the Center. The planters feature rocks, most of which were found on Raven Hill property. My favorites include different puddingstones or conglomerates that are 750 million-year-old fossilized glacial debris. One of the planters was originally a pond where we housed some papyrus in the winter, but young visitors found it too inviting to play in the water!



*During the winter of 1991-92, the floor evolved from cement to odd lots of hardwood flooring to the beautiful finished floor that visitors see today! On your next visit, see if you can identify any of the different woods!*



*The floor tiles in the "blue" bathroom are actually leftover from building our house!*

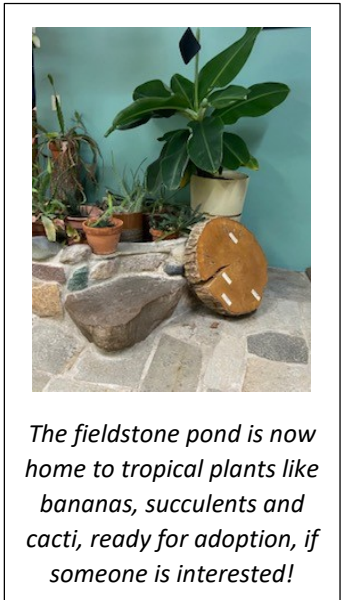


*The window sill in the kitchen now has counter underneath that functions as additional workspace for staff and volunteers. Notice how the outside has changed over time too!*

Finally, we purchased and installed different kinds of limestone and granite to top the counters in the kitchen and for use as window sills throughout the original part of the building. One of the kitchen counters is repurposed granite siding from the old Field's Department Store in Jackson, Michigan. As with the wood flooring identification, someday there will be small brass plaques telling visitors the name of the marble or granite they are seeing and where each originated.

While we enjoy watching visitors play in the hands-on room, hold the animals, explore outside and experience the Smithsonian **Labor Days: History of Work** exhibit, we also love it when people notice the history, art and science of Raven Hill's interior design. Next time you visit the Center, take a minute to look around you and enjoy the work that went into making Raven Hill a special place!

Be sure to stop and see the Smithsonian **Labor Days: History of Work** exhibit soon. Raven Hill collaborated with the Smithsonian and many local historical societies and museums to make this exhibition come together. The exhibit is open daily from 10am to 4pm through September 30, 2021. Starting October 1st, the exhibit will be open on weekends and by appointment until the spring of 2022. Groups of ten or more, such as school groups and service organizations, are encouraged to make reservations to view this unique look into northern Michigan's work history. Call 231.536.3369 or email [info@miravenhill.org](mailto:info@miravenhill.org) to set a date and time for your group to visit the **Labor Days** exhibit.



*The fieldstone pond is now home to tropical plants like bananas, succulents and cacti, ready for adoption, if someone is interested!*



*East Jordan Rotary recently visited Raven Hill. They had dinner catered, ate at the Picnic Pavilion and then came inside to view the **Labor Days: History of Work** exhibition. Think about bringing your group to see this unique exhibit. Call soon to reserve a day and time.*

As always, for the sake of the children who cannot yet be vaccinated, we ask everyone to mask up while inside Raven Hill. Please, do your part: get vaccinated, wash your hands thoroughly, wear your mask correctly, socially distance & stay away from large gatherings.

Please stay safe,

**Cheri**

*(Above right) Northern Michigan hardwoods being harvested for sale in the late 1800's—same kinds of woods as in Raven Hill's floor. See the photo in the Smithsonian **Labor Days** exhibit. Photo courtesy of Charlevoix Historical Society*

*(Below right) Three of the exotic hardwoods used in Raven Hill's floor—zebrawood, rosewood and satinwood! Look carefully to see all three!*

