

# taft times

Fall 2014

Northern Illinois University Lorado Taft Field Campus

Oregon, IL

## Remembering 60 Years at Lorado Taft

NIU's Lorado Taft Field Campus opened in 1954. Since that first group of NIU students came to learn about teaching in the out of doors, tens of thousands of NIU, elementary, and middle school students have taken part in the outdoor education program. Thousands more have enjoyed Taft Campus as part of a conference group. These include NIU groups, high school peer leadership retreats, church retreats, scrapbooking groups, kite enthusiast clubs, and many more! Whether here for a day or a week, people of all ages have made memories while participating in programs at Taft for the last 60 years. To help commemorate our anniversary, we asked for your memories of your time at Taft. Here are some of our favorites:

Kellie Kerfin submitted her memories of coming to Lowden State Park as a child with her family. Then, in middle school, she remembers, she came to Taft with her class as a student at Genoa-Kingston Middle School. She remembers that it was torture to not be able to choose her cabin-mates, but in the end, with everyone in the same "uncomfortable boat," it was great fun. In high school, Kellie returned to Taft as a participant in Operation Snowball's weekend retreats. According to Kellie, "Happiness, love and healing took place on those weekends." She remembers fondly new friends and old looking over the river in the beautiful dining hall and the warmth of the buildings on the cold winter weekends.

Several members of the 2000-2001 staff shared some of the quotes they noted from students. A couple of favorites: "Andy could get arrested if he danced in public like that," from a student from Washington School; and "Give me a cheeseburger and lay me down," from a hungry sixth grader from Thompson School.

Jessica Herro was a staff member from 2001-2003. One of her favorite memories was the Halloween hike we put on for the school that was on campus for Halloween night one year. She remembers the cardboard maze that Dan created in Taft House and her portrayal of the Compost Troll. She also fondly remembers the night hikes – seeing kids grow comfortable with being in the woods at night, seeing "glow worms" on the trail, listening to owl calls, and observing the stars and the moon.

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### New STEM Class: Endeavors in Engineering

We have an exciting new class being offered at Taft this year! Shauna, one of our new staff members introduced a STEM-focused large group activity called Endeavors in Engineering. This class fits nicely into a two hour time block and is a great option for an indoor evening program or a rainy day activity.

The activity allows students to creatively design, build, manage, and market a product while working in a small group and competing against the rest of the school. The students need to "buy" supplies from our store, engineer a vehicle that can transport a "heavy object," and advertise their product to the school. The students work in small teams and every student has a job in order to contribute to the group's overall success.



The resulting vehicles are incredible and the commercial performances are brilliant. The new class has been a huge success so far. If your school is interested in Endeavors in Engineering, be sure to talk to your Taft coordinator.



# 2014-15 Taft Education Staff



Front row: From left to right,

Melanie Costello,  
Heidi Vasel,  
Shannon Forney,  
Amy Banner,  
Kelsey Thorp.

Middle row:  
Ashley  
VanSpeybroeck,  
Kendra Swanson,  
Katie McBride,  
Shauna Guglielmo.

Back row: Joshua  
Hapner, Jared Wicks.

Not pictured:  
Kenzie Cullen.

## Meet the staff

### Melanie Costello

Favorite Book: Little House Series  
Taft Choice Class: Fire Science  
Birthplace: Sycamore, Illinois

### Katie McBride

Favorite Book: Dracula  
Taft Choice Class: Energy  
Birthplace: Rockford, Illinois

### Kenzie Cullen

Favorite Book: The Vampire Chronicles by Anne Rice  
Taft Choice Class:

### Kendra Swanson

Favorite Book: Grapes of Wrath  
Taft Choice Class: Animal Science  
Birthplace: Milbank, South Dakota

### Kelsey Thorp

Favorite Book: The BFG  
Taft Choice Class: Geology  
Birthplace: Adeline, Illinois

Performance and Movement Arts  
Birthplace: Dixon, Illinois

### Shauna Guglielmo

Favorite Book: Jesus' Son by Denis Johnson  
Taft Choice Class: Entomology  
Birthplace: Waterbury, Connecticut

### Amy Banner

Favorite Book: The Disappearing Spoon  
Taft Choice Class: Playground Science  
Birthplace: Youngstown, Ohio

### Shannon Forney

Favorite Book: Eragon  
Taft Choice Class: Dance  
Birthplace: Elgin, Illinois

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## Meet the Staff

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### Joshua Hapner

Favorite Book: Lord of the Rings Trilogy  
Taft Choice Class: Wildlife Jeopardy  
Birthplace: Fort Wayne, Indiana

### Jared Wicks

Favorite Book: Lord of the Rings Trilogy  
Taft Choice Class: Knots  
Birthplace: Peoria, Illinois

### Ashley VanSpeybroeck

Favorite Book: Fahrenheit 451  
Taft Choice Class: Mycology  
Birthplace: Moline, Illinois

### Heidi Vasel

Favorite Book: Charlotte's Web  
Taft Choice Class: Andy Goldsworthy Art  
Birthplace: South Dakota

## Remembering 60 Years at Taft

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Irving McGrath mentioned having to carry 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders through “what seemed like three feet of snow,” out to South Field and back for Orienteering and Alpha Wolf.

During this summer's Trail Days Festival, I had the pleasure of meeting an older gentlemen who told me about the summer that he worked on the construction of the Grover/Eagle's Nest building.

And of course, so many people fondly remember the great food!

So many others have made memories at Lorado Taft Campus over the years, whether they attended one time as an elementary or middle school student, experienced Taft as a NIU student, came back year after year as a school teacher, participated in a conference or retreat through one of the variety of organizations that use our campus for that purpose, or worked on the campus. We hope that we will continue to be a place of fun, outdoor learning; “happiness, love, and healing;” meeting new people and having new experiences for many years to come.

## Mexican Jumping Beans at Taft???

Recently while working with a school group, one of the students brought my attention to something interesting she had found on the ground. There were a couple little bean-like things that appeared to be some kind of seeds. They were about an eighth of an inch long and shaped like an over-inflated football with a tan stripe around the middle. I had to admit that I had no idea what they were. The most amazing thing was that when held in the palm of the hand they would periodically twitch or even jump an inch or two into the air! Upon close inspection, you could see the form of a tiny grub inside the “bean” just under the translucent surface.

After some time searching the internet for answers, I finally figured out what we had found. These little “beans” were in fact the cocoons of a certain tiny species of wasp. This wasp (*Bathyplectes anurus*) is a beneficial species as it parasitizes alfalfa weevils (a pest species that damages alfalfa crops). The wasp eggs are initially laid in a weevil. After hatching, the wasp larva begins munching on the weevil's insides, eventually killing it. Once the larva is big enough, it then leaves the carcass of the weevil and builds a cocoon around itself. While in the cocoon, it gradually metamorphoses into the adult wasp form, at which point it exits the cocoon.

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# Mexican Jumping Beans at Taft?!?!

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What we found that day were the wasp grubs in their cocoon stage. This particular species is noted to jump around while in their cocoons. There are several theories on why the larvae would want to jump around while in their cocoons, but no one is completely sure what benefit this provides the larvae.

It is really awesome when you are walking around and find something in nature that you have never seen before. In all my years of hiking around and exploring the outdoors, I had never come across such a simple, yet amazing thing as these wasp cocoons. Meanwhile, these wasps had been going on with their daily lives all the time, and I have no doubt walked right past these little guys many times before and not noticed them. It just goes to show what wondrous things may be right around us if we but remember to look down at the little things at our feet from time to time!

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*Special thanks to the students at Ambrose Plamondon School who found the wasp cocoons!*

<http://www.biocontrol.entomology.cornell.edu/parasitoids/bathyplectes.html>

## Zero Ort!

Congratulations to the following schools for having ZERO ORT during a meal at Taft!

ZERO ORT for Multiple Meals  
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Academy (6)  
River Ridge (2)  
P.E. Majors-fall (2)

Harrison Street  
Hough Street School  
Elgin Academy 6th Grade



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### ***Taft Times Contributors:***

*Remembering 60 Years at Lorado Taft* by Melanie Costello  
*New STEM Class: Endeavors in Engineering* by Amy Banner  
*Mexican Jumping Beans at Taft?!?!* by Joshua Hapner  
Newsletter Editors: Kendra Swanson & Amy Banner

