

The Nature of Nature - Cortellini

In November, the Polis center will put on their 14th Spirit and Place festival – a Civic collaboration of the Arts, Humanities, and Religion. <http://www.spiritandplace.org/AboutTheFestival.aspx> . The festival has grown remarkably in participation, attendance, and quality in the last decade and is today, recognized nationally as a major cultural event.

This year the theme, “Inspiring Places,” was taken up by Green Broad Ripple in partnership with Marian College of Indianapolis to develop an event entitled “Nature of Nature.” I have had the pleasure of working with a team from Marian including Janice Hicks Slaughter, Director of K-12 Programming and Outreach, School of Mathematics and Sciences. Together, we have designed a program, described in the collaborative narrative that follows, which became part of our event application. We submitted the application last Friday, March 6. The application will be reviewed by a selection committee who will inform us in May as to whether our project is among those selected.



Nature of Nature will engage the audience on two levels in two distinct environments. Starting at Marian College, people will gather in the Nina Mason Pulliam Nature Center which is adjacent to the EcoLab. The EcoLab is a 55-acre wetland and lowland forest located on the north end of the campus. It is an inspiring place including historical significance, educational relevance, beauty and a natural habitat for wildlife. Participants will take a tour of the EcoLab and then hear and participate in a discussion about the natural and historical significance of the area. They will also learn about important restoration and preservation of the area. There will be a specific discussion about how the preservation of the natural

biodiversity in the EcoLab relates to the development of Green Alleys in Broad Ripple. Green Broad Ripple, Inc. is currently developing "Green Alleys," a project to encourage more opportunities for alleys to connect to nature.

On the following day, open house tours will be held at two alley sites (within walking distance) in Broad Ripple which will highlight work completed, work in progress, and plans for the future. Refreshments will be available. The Green Alleys tour and presentation will cause participants to become aware of and think about significant urban spaces and how they might better incorporate nature. It may inspire participants to act on and plan for ways to make their yards, alleys, neighborhoods, schools, churches, etc. more sustainable. It will also highlight the holistic nature of ecological systems and the need to think in Whole System terms in order to effectively ReNature our urban environment.

On the third day of the *Nature of Nature* series, Marian College will be the site of a meeting to recap what has been covered at the two sites, discuss the practical aspects of making it happen, and plan for future action.

The primary intended outcome of the *Nature of Nature* programs is to increase awareness of Indianapolis places that inspire; and how anyone, regardless of experience or knowledge, can take small or bold steps to make a positive change in local spaces and make the quality of life better for everyone. The partnership between Marian College and Green Broad Ripple, Inc. brings together a historical space that has implemented sustainability practices and urban areas seeking to do the same. The expertise shared from both partners comes from experience and commitment to sustainability and preservation. The message being that sustainability can occur anywhere, regardless of size, natural or man-made attributes, or experience. After these programs, whether participants attend all or only one, they will be much better informed and prepared to take the first steps toward sustainability in their designated areas - large or small.

Photo: EcoLab – Courtesy Marian College