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# Our parks are waiting for you

*Plenty of opportunities to reshape your attitude in a Portage park*

OK, let me start by getting one thing out in the open. When it comes to playing in the woods, I am still a 10-year-old. I still am fascinated by nature and the things that I find when I make the time to get outside. I guess that's why I have so much fun as a Cub Scout Leader.

Last year, our group took a trip to Camp Spelman, an old Scout camp now one of the properties in the Portage Park District. It has a serene little meadow with a pavilion, another pavilion down in the main camp area, a beautiful lake, and forest all around.

Located between Kent and Streetsboro, it has a surprisingly remote feel to it.

The wildlife must think so, too. When I went out to see the property for the first time I was awestruck when I saw a red fox trot out of the woods at the edge of the clearing.

The fox paused, looked around, and then continued on its evening patrol, never once acknowledging my presence. I was hooked!

At the end of the school year we had our Scout family campout there. We arrived in the afternoon and set up tents in the grass under the shade of a majestic oak tree. The families spent the rest of the day playing in the woods, fishing, and just relaxing outside.

There is a remnant of a playground there where the little kids hung out. The bigger kids played Capture the Flag in the woods.

I spent most of my time down by the lake watching the kids catch fish. The exuberance of a boy when he pulls that first fish from the water is hard to top. Many of the kids did catch their first fish that day, and I am sure they will cherish that memory for a long time. We released all of the fish as we caught them, and I believe that they all returned safely to their lake life.

Another great thing is showing a 10-year-old boy something gross. We had the perfect opportunity. In the lake at Camp Spelman there are a

GREEN  
PORTAGE

Kurt Ruehr



number of very large carp.

When our group was there, one had died and floated to the surface. It had that memorable three-day-old fish smell to it, and really brought out comical reactions from the boys.

Even better was the pizza-sized snapping turtle tearing away voraciously at the putrid flesh. The boys watched with delighted horror as the circle of life played out before them.

At dinner the boys shared their tales and accomplishments of the day, re-enacting various events and laughing together. As the evening drew in around us, we lit a campfire, handed out some awards, and retired our old pack flag, which had seen better days. It was an incredible day.

Most of us are on the run all day every day. Please just remember this remedy for life's woes. If you are ever having a bad day, you should try helping a boy or girl catch that first fish. You could also try finding something unusual (even gross) in nature to delight a child.

Or try walking quietly in the forest and seeing the animals there. Just get outside. There is nothing better at re-shaping your attitude. Our parks are waiting.

For more information on camping in Camp Spelman, call the Portage Park District office at (330) 297-7728.

Kurt Ruehr is a father of four, serves as a Scout leader, and works as a financial adviser for MetLife Resources. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.