

**Burlington County Times**

# **Rancocas Nature Center to host first Arbor Day festival**

By JEANNIE O'SULLIVAN Staff writer | Posted: Sunday, April 20, 2014 4:05 pm

WESTAMPTON — The Friends of Rancocas Nature Center are planning to pay homage to trees or, as they call them, “the Earth’s lungs.”

The fundraising group is hosting its first Arbor Day festival, in honor of the tree-planting holiday celebrated on the last Friday in April, from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday. The free event will be held at the center, a 210-acre attraction in the Rancocas State Park off Rancocas Road.

The Friends help support the operations and programs offered by the center, which is run jointly by the township, county and state.

Trees, which emit oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, will be the focus of a variety of presentations, hikes, and children’s activities, along with a tree planting and poster contest.

The festival will add a spring event to the 35-year-old center’s schedule of annual activities, which include a winter meeting, a summer garden showcase and a fall discovery day. It will also highlight the need to replace the trees lost to severe weather events like Superstorm Sandy, which prompted the New Jersey Tree Recovery Campaign to distribute 115,000 trees throughout the month.

The winter’s record snowfall didn’t help, either, according to Lavonne Bebler Johnson, communications chairwoman for the Friends.

“There was a lot of tree damage this winter, so we figured there would be an interest in trees. And it never hurts to plant more trees,” Bebler Johnson said.

Guest speakers boasting a range of knowledge will make presentations, starting with International Society of Arboriculture member Mark Demitroff, a licensed tree expert and a researcher in permafrost, paleohydrology and geodiversity.

Others include anthropologist and Red Dragon Canoe Club member John W. Lawrence, Ithaca College forestry expert Bella Ciabattini, tree farmer Ted Daniecki, Lumberton arborist Ken Hutz, landscape architect Eric Baratta, Westampton Township Committee members, and members of the Burlington County Board of Freeholders.

Participants can choose from timed events and ongoing activities.

The schedule is as follows:

- Introductions, 12:30-1
- Historic tree hike, 12:45-2:15
- Planting of an American hazelnut tree (for children), 1
- Lecture, “Our Forest Heritage: Early Forest Employment,” 1-1:30
- Interactive children’s skit, “My Life As a Log,” 2-3
- Presentation, “Trees of Burlington County,” 2-2:30
- Tree planting of a flowering dogwood (for children), 3
- Awards ceremony for the children’s poster contest, themed, “What Trees Mean to Me,” 3:15

Kids’ activities will get underway in the children’s yard. They will focus on Native American tree uses, tree grafting techniques, an “ask the arborist” session, tree seedling giveaways, and summer camp registration.

A variety of displays will provide information on tree ecosystems, gardening and center membership. Baked goods and birdseeds will be for sale.

Parking is free, but carpooling is recommended because space is limited. Overflow parking is available in Rancocas State Park. A free shuttle bus will transport visitors to the center.

For more information, call 609-261-2495 or visit  
[www.rancocasnaturecenter.org](http://www.rancocasnaturecenter.org).