

Lauren Borer

By Donna Ahrens

Lauren Borer, the Wildflower Garden's program coordinator, grew up in urban Rochester, NY, but the outdoors has always been her preferred milieu.

"I was always interested in nature and water. I was in a state park yesterday and I saw a dad with a little girl and she was in the water, just looking at all the little creatures she was finding, and I thought, 'Yep, that was me and my dad; I was that kid,'" she says.

As she speaks, Lauren is busily gathering milkweed and feeding caterpillars in the Garden. In her classes, she's a picture of boundless energy and enthusiasm—whether she's kneeling in the dirt to get a close-up look at a soldier beetle on a plant, demonstrating how to use binoculars in a bird-watching session or urging kids in a springtime class to feel the bark on different trees.

Lauren's interest in the environment and natural resources led her to Paul Smith's College of the Adirondacks, in New York, where she earned an associate's degree in ecology and environmental technology (water quality). She then transferred to the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at the State University of New York, where she obtained a degree in environmental and forest biology with a concentration in wildlife biology in 1999. After working for several years as a naturalist in various environmental programs, including a summer in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota, Lauren completed a secondary teaching certification program at the University of Montana.

Lauren came to Minneapolis to join attorney Andy Borer, who became her husband. She was working as a neighborhood naturalist for the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Department when she saw the listing for an opening for program coordinator at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. Though

she hadn't visited—or even known about—the Garden, she was intrigued by the description of this "hidden gem" in the city.

She's found the job satisfies her interests in all things flora and fauna—and in teaching others about the natural world. Now wrapping up her fourth season at the Garden, Lauren says she had the good fortune to be able to build on existing curricula developed by her predecessor and the Garden's naturalists. "There was a great foundation laid out for me, so I've expanded on what was already here," she says. Over the past few years, that's meant forging and strengthening partnerships with the Minneapolis Public School District and charter schools, community organizations and programs, and family groups.

It's a busy, sometimes daunting, schedule: This year Lauren and the naturalists led 53 programs, serving nearly 800 people, during June, July and August.

In addition to the Seeds of Science partnership with the Minneapolis Public School District, this year Lauren developed a curriculum for a group of home-schooled students, ages nine to 12, who came to the Garden once a month except for July. She's eager to continue working with this group, noting that the parents whose kids have participated are already asking about next year's programs.

She's also hoping to expand program options for adults in addition to garden club tours. She'll start working on 2012 programming over the winter. In the meantime, she'll do some substitute teaching in the Anoka-Hennepin school district and work as a "freelance naturalist" with home-school coops and other groups during the winter months.

—Donna Ahrens is a member of the Friends board of directors.



Lauren's FAVORITES



Favorite flower: Starflower. "In late May and June, when I see the starflowers start to bloom over in the bog, I just get all kinds of happy."

Thoughts on different times of year in the Garden: "I love to see the spring woodland wildflowers coming into bloom because it reminds me of back home in New York. The prairie in the summertime is always a challenge for me because I didn't grow up in a prairie state, so every year I have to re-learn everything. But having to puzzle through everything is such a great learning experience. And I love it here in the fall because it's so quiet and so beautiful."

Favorite moment in programming: "It's the moment that often comes when a class visits the Garden and the kids get overstimulated and a bit rowdy, and a teacher or chaperone says, apologetically: 'I'm sorry, we're not used to being outside.' And I always tell them, 'It's okay, don't apologize, and – hurrah! – You're outside all day.' To be able to give kids this opportunity to be out in nature – it's so cool."