

Real Good and For Free

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Over the last ten years, I have attended many wonderful and free children's programs, including story-times, craft and drawing programs, and music and theatre performances, many occurring through Durham County Library. Most of the time I have been amazed at how few people take advantage of these wonderful, free activities. Albeit, the 'lapsitters' and toddler storytimes at Southwest and South Regional Libraries on weekday mornings are always packed, but other, older kids' programs are often only sparsely attended. I can't count the number of library-sponsored 'Rags to Riches' theatre performances attended by only a handful of children, and this is a professional theatre group that usually requires a ticket purchase. 'The Two Bells' is another amazing storyteller duo whose past Durham County Library performances (with the exception of the main library) have had sparse attendance. This talented African American married couple sings songs, tells stories and recites poems that are saturated with African American heritage and based on books that attendees are encouraged to read, with a meaning and lyricism that stays with you for life. Nowadays my children regularly attend 'Drawing with [professional artist] Tom Czaplinski' at the main library on Thursday afternoons (3:30), and I am thrilled with the artwork that adorns the walls throughout my house, some of which I've even framed for permanent display. Sadly there are usually only 2 or 3 other kids in Tom's classes.

The Durham Youth Violin Group's free performances, while widely attended at the Museum of Life and Science's Butterfly Wings Festival, has had only small audiences (outside of their own families) at other events (Northgate/Southpoint Mall, Durham County Libraries), and this is usually because some crazy lady (me) seeks out innocent bystanders and ushers them into the room(s). Fortunately they are always grateful afterwards.

Two years ago, I caused my family to forgo an international trip because I had a previous commitment to do two story- and craft-times for Creek Week at the Parkwood (now South Regional) library. Several brothers from Duke's Alpha Fraternity even read stories and helped with the craft. My kids were the only two in attendance, though I convinced a couple other kids from the book stacks to join us. Needless to say, my husband was not happy (we hadn't told the kids about the prospective trip yet, thank goodness). Last year we had a few more kids at the CreekWeek story/craft time, but the attendance was still meager at best. This brings me to the point of this article: CreekWeek.

On Wednesday, 16 March 2011, the Durham News printed a small paragraph informing 'residents interested in local waterways' to mark their calendars for Durham's Creek Week (March 19-26). I hope that those who don't even think they have an interest in local waterways will also try to attend the free events offered by Durham organizations throughout CreekWeek.

For a small fee, teens and adults can take a guided canoe or kayak trip and visit beavers, eagles, and egrets (among other beautiful creatures) that live on our creeks and lakes, most of which are remarkably within a 5 mile radius of increasingly dense suburban areas like Southpoint Mall. But you don't have to risk getting wet (or spend any money) to enjoy Creek Week events. On March 19 (8AM to 1 PM), there will be a performance by the Durham Youth Violinists, educational activities/crafts, a bird and butterfly watch/identification, plantings and other free, fun events for kids and adults at Sandy Creek Park. On Wednesday at the Museum of Life and Science, Durham Parks and Recreation and the Haw River Assembly will have hands-on exhibits featuring the animals that live in Durham's creeks (admission is free to Durham residents on Wednesday afternoons). There are also various free walks along Durham waterways, including butterfly and turtle treks, lead by Durhamites who are knowledgeable

about the associated animals and ecology. Kids are encouraged to attend with their parents. And once again there will be creek-week themed story- and craft-times at Durham County libraries (Southwest: March 22 and 24, 10:30 AM; South Regional: March 22, 7 PM). These are great opportunities to educate your kids about our water resources and the wildlife that depends on them. They may go home with their very own butterfly, tadpole or plant (don't worry, the former two are crafts, not live critters).

I have often said that all parents are homeschoolers, by definition. So get your students/kids to these great educational opportunities that your wonderful city and county neighbors are providing, free of charge. You won't regret it. For more information, visit www.keepdurhambeautiful.org/our-programs/special-events/creek-week-events.html