



Flowing a New Path: The Journey in Rebranding Ourselves from Oldest Theme Park in Texas to Successful Nature Center

Meadows Center for Water and the Environment
Texas State University

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Photo: Bill Alger



The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment
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[EXPLORE SPRING LAKE.ORG](http://EXPLORESPRINGLAKE.ORG)



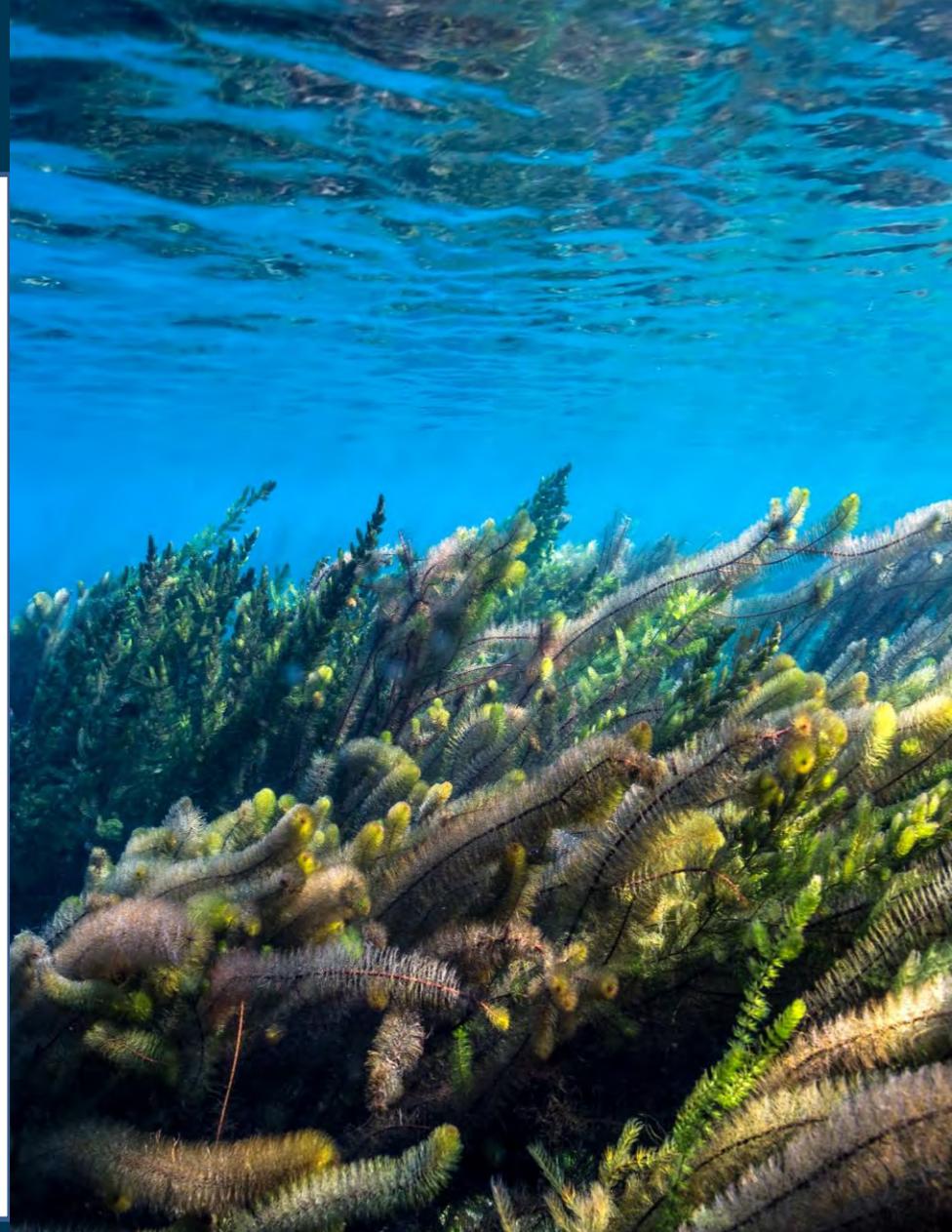
- The Meadows Center was established by Texas State University in 2002 as a leadership initiative to coordinate and further university-wide efforts in the field of aquatic resource management.
- We are geographers, biologists, engineers, social scientists, urban and regional planners, strategists, and experts in community engagement and public policy.
- We are dedicated to helping our partners find economic, social, cultural, and environmental resilience.
- In 2012, The Meadows Foundation contributed a transformational gift to Texas State University.

OUR MISSION

Inspiring research, innovation, and leadership that ensures clean, abundant water for the environment and all humanity.

OUR VISION

A world where all people understand and embrace the value of water and environmental stewardship.



OUR PILLARS

We fulfill our mission by integrating activities across four pillars of action in powerful ways. Our work in each of these pillars begins at Spring Lake – one of the largest artesian springs in the world – and ripples outward across Texas and beyond.



RESEARCH

Conducting Solutions-Focused Research



EDUCATION

Encouraging Life-Long Learning



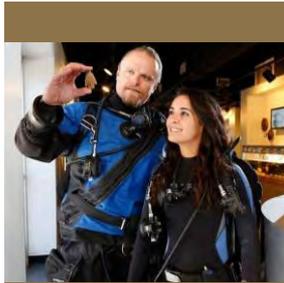
STEWARDSHIP

Cultivating a Stewardship Ethic



LEADERSHIP

Transforming Knowledge into Action



Conducting Solutions-Focused Research

RESEARCH

- Conduct applied research to address real-world problems
- Advance science-based solutions to water challenges
- Increase understanding of complex water and natural systems
- Promote sustainable management of water
- Work with multi-disciplinary expertise across campus to catalyze research on water resources
- Utilize Spring Lake as a living laboratory for research



Cultivating a Stewardship Ethic

STEWARDSHIP

- Inspire protection and management of cultural and natural resources
- Manage Spring Lake and its significant habitat, species, and archaeology
- Strengthen Texas State University ties to the San Marcos community and beyond by connecting stewardship of water to quality of life
- Cultivate a stewardship ethic and practice



Transforming Knowledge into Action

LEADERSHIP

- Support responsible natural resource and water policy in Texas
- Convene stakeholders to address critical water and natural resource challenges
- Serve in voluntary leadership roles in diverse contexts, such as on boards of directors, steering committees, watershed councils, and panels providing expert testimony
- Build capacity of local communities to protect and steward their water and natural resources





Encouraging Life-Long Learning

EDUCATION

- Connect children and families to nature
- Engage new stakeholders in water and environmental stewardship
- Disseminate knowledge of water and natural resources
- Demonstrate responsible recreation to encourage stewardship
- Provide educational opportunities to Texas State University students
- Publish books as trusted sources on water and environmental topics
- Cultivate and prepare the next generation of conservation leaders



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How the story Begins



Brief Timeline

- 10,000 B.C., Paleo-Indian artifacts found
- 7,000 B.C.-A.D. 800, Archaic Period
- 1500-1700 A.D. Proto-History Period, establishing the Camino Real
- 1755-1812 A.D., Spanish Settlement
- 1831-1851 A.D., Settling of San Marcos, General Burleson



1929-1994

Aquarena Springs

1926, A.B. Rogers purchased the land around the headwaters and built the Spring Lake Hotel, which opened in 1929.

1949, Paul Rogers bought the land from his family and rigged a paddle boat with a glass bottom and began to take family and friend out to see the bubbling springs, plants and animals

1960-1980s, Rogers continued to add buildings and attractions to become a favorite tourist destination

1985, the Paul J. Rogers Trust sold Aquarena Springs to John Baugh



*"Rogers' Spring Lake Park Hotel"
opened to a crowd on April 22, 1929. Today,
Aquarena Springs Inn is still a favored
stopping place for Texans and visitors.*





Photo: Bill Alger



DEAN BRENNAN
TEAM PHOTOGRAPHY

Creation of the Spring Lake Education Program

- 1994-1996, Southwest Texas State University (Now Texas State University) purchased the land and operated the theme park as Aquarena Springs
- 1996, Aquarena Springs was transformed into an Environmental Nature Center, Aquarena Center
- 2011, Army Corp of Engineers Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration removed all impervious ground cover, building from theme park and submarine theatre to restore the area to a native black land prairie.
- 2012, Following the The Meadows Foundation gift to the University, Aquarena was rebranded into The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment-Spring Lake Education Program

Explore Spring Lake



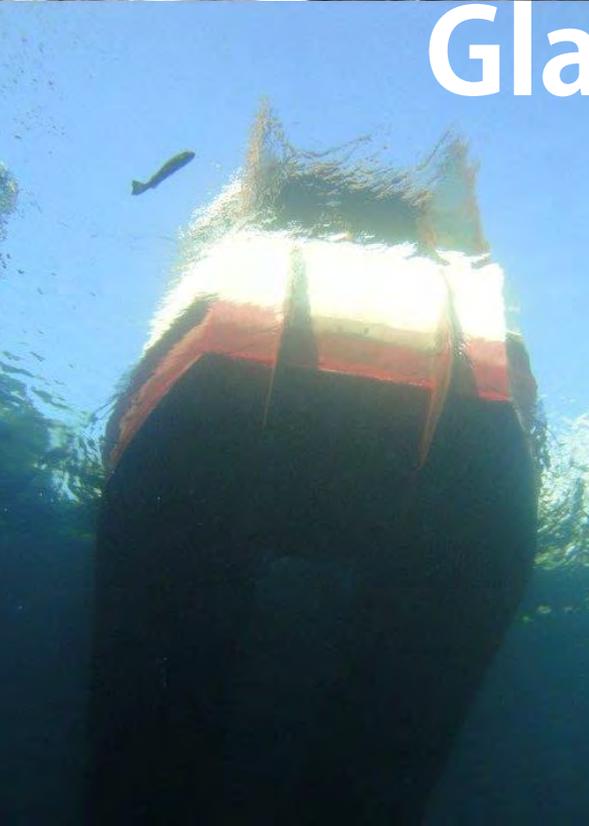


Spring Lake Education Program

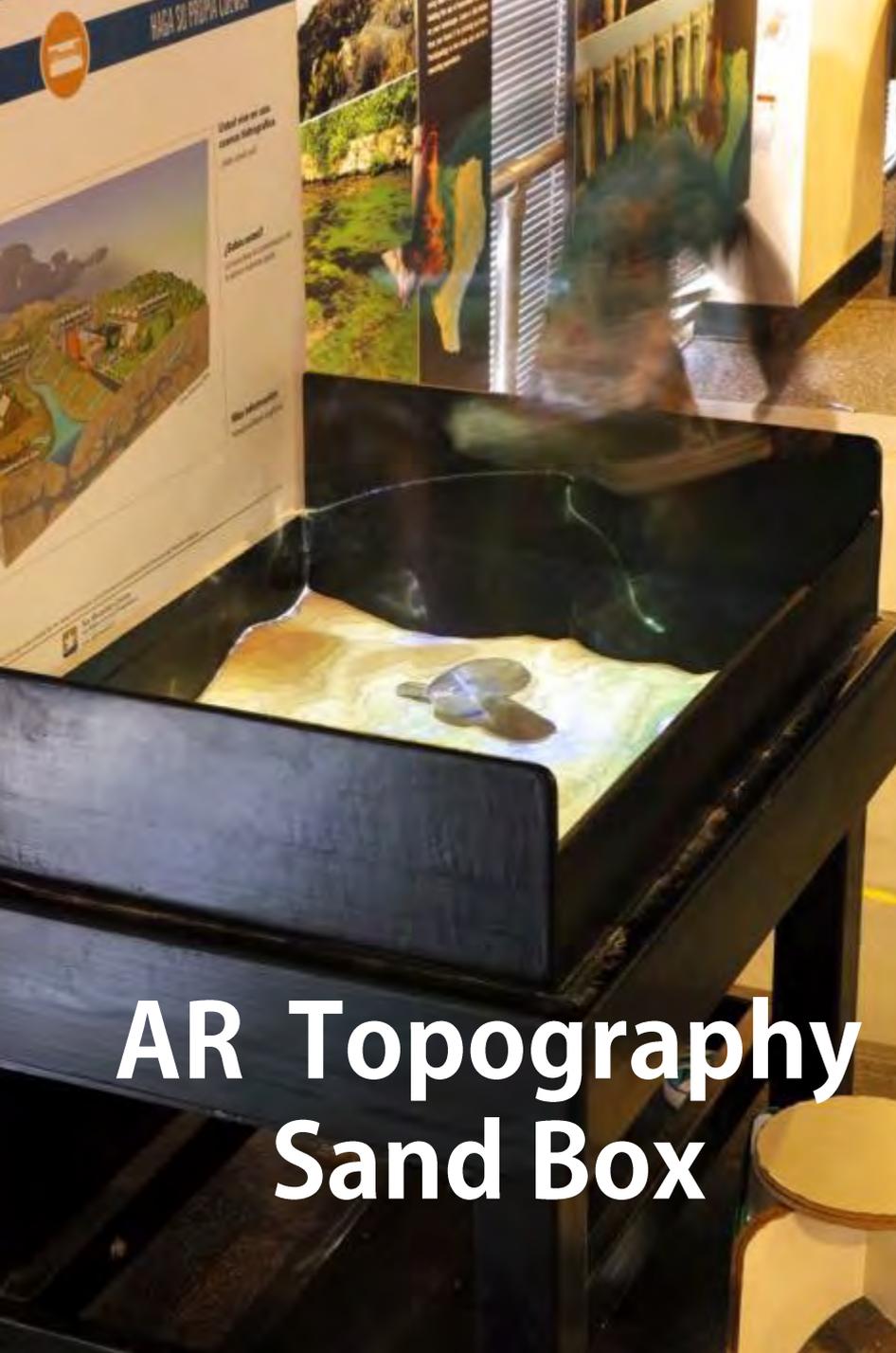
The Meadows Center engages more than 125,000 people each year in environmental education and outdoor learning activities at Spring Lake and elsewhere. Our programs engage people of all ages, teach them about Spring Lake and the importance of water to all living things, and inspire them to become stewards of our natural resources. Our programs offer



Glass-Bottom Boats







AR Topography Sand Box

Aqua Corp and Open Water Diving



Kayaking and SUP





Outdoor Facility Rentals

- Corporate Functions
- Family Reunions
- Weddings
- Powwow
- Triathlons
- Texas Water Safari



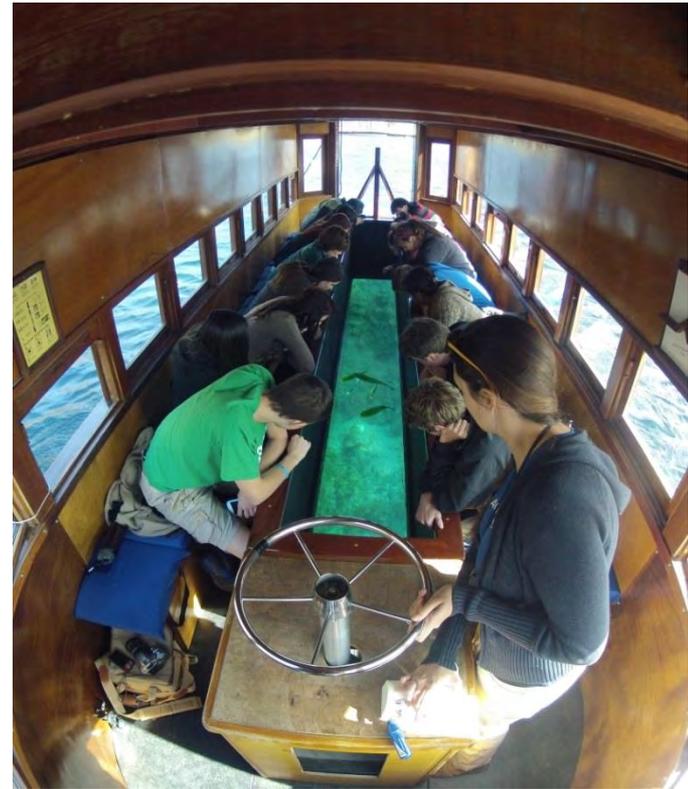
FY 2017 Attendance

Total Attendance to Spring Lake	105,114*
Public Glass-bottom boat	60,894
Group Tours	26,575
University Groups	6,317
Special Events	8,548
Scuba	2,287
SUP and Kayak Tours	493

*paid attendance

Our Staff

- 5 full-time staff
- 15-35 part-time workers
(Varies seasonally)
 - Environmental Interpreters
 - Boat Drivers
 - Tour Guides
 - Ticket Booth/Gift Shop



When you were a kid....

- What were your favorite activities?
- Looking back at our list, how many of these activities are outdoors? Do you think the list would be different for people who were children in the 1950s or children today?
- “Taste the Mud Pie”

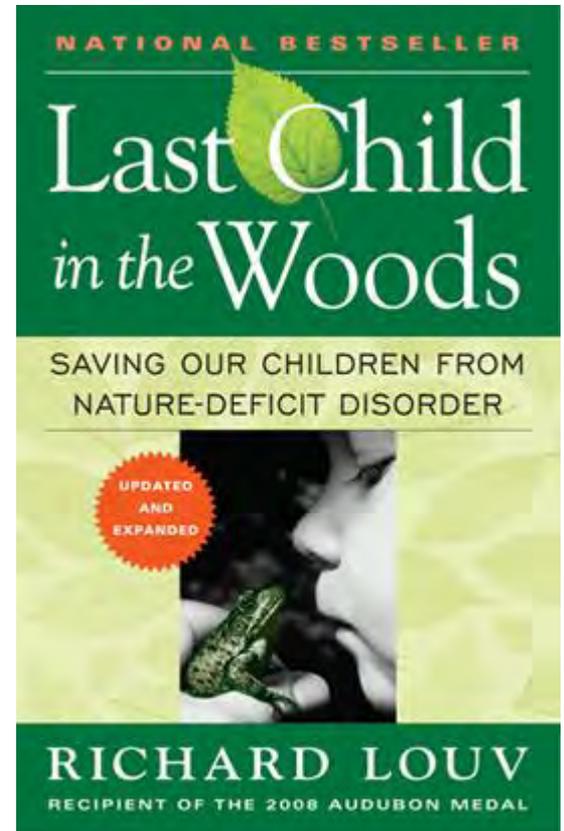


Carter Smith, Executive Director of Texas Parks and Wildlife

- Children today spend an average of 7.5 hours a day using electronic media such as TV, computers, video games and music players- equivalent to a full-time job.
- A child is 6 times more likely to play a video game than ride a bike.
- Kids age 3 to 12 spend only 1% of their time outdoors, compared to 27% watching video

What is Nature-Deficit?

- Disconnection with Nature
- Influential Book
- Studies show that U.S. children spend half as much time in nature as kids did 20 years ago



Stewards of the Future?

- Are we creating a generation full of people unconnected to the outdoors?
- What does this mean for conservation?



OR



Mental and Physical Benefits

- Nature-deficit has been linked to ADHD, depression, and obesity in children.
- "studies suggest that exposure to nature may reduce symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and that it can improve all children's cognitive abilities and resistance to negative stresses and depression" (Louv, 2006, p. 34).



The Solution: Outdoor Education

- Outdoor education uses nature as our classroom.
- “The best way to improve children’s performance in the classroom may be to take them out of it” (Parker-Pope, 2009, p.1).
- “research suggests that play and down time may be as important to a child’s academic experience as reading, science and math, and that regular recess, fitness or nature time can influence behavior, concentration and even grades” (Parker-Pope, 2009, p.1).



Issues That We Face

- Students unconnected to nature.
- Kids are not used to being outside.
- Some Fear Nature!



Interpretation

Defined as a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.

-National Association for Interpretation



Tilden's Principles (1957)

1. Relate. Compare, contrast, make it personal
2. Reveal. Help the visitor discover something new
3. Provoke. Inspire profound thought or action
4. Arts. Employ multiple learning styles
5. Holistic. Give the resource context (the bigger story)
6. Appropriate. Consider the audience



Kelsey "Blue" Lee's favorite memory at The MCWE

Educational Programs

- School Field Trips
 - Customized for all ages
 - Interactive Activities
 - Aligned with TEKS
- Private tours for
 - Scouts
 - Senior Citizen Groups
 - Church Groups
 - Homeschool Groups
 - Birthday Parties



Education Partnerships

- REI – outdoor school paddling classes
- Austin Youth River Watch - train, educate and support low income students
- TPWD - Texas Aquatic Science curriculum



Texas Aquatic Science Certified Field Site



- Identified and modified activities to be site specific from the Texas Aquatic Science textbook
- Integrated into Spring Lake curriculum



Field Trip Evaluations

- 100% of teachers felt this field trip helped them with their curriculum goals.
- 100% of teachers said they would come on a field trip again
- 72% of students indicated they have improved their water conservation habits.



25-Minute Guided Wetlands Tours

- July 2015, began offering 25-minute guided wetlands tours
- Summer months: offered tours daily
- Fall, winter, and spring: offered weekends only
- First month: 1,674 guests participated
- First four months: 3,193 guests participated



45-Minute Glass Bottom Boat Tour

- June 2016: began offering a 45-minute Glass-bottom boat tours.
- Summer months: offered tours daily
- Fall, winter, and spring: offered weekends only
- First month: 1,768 guests participated
- First four months: 7,045 guests participated

New 45 Minute Extended Tours



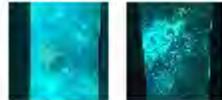
Jen L
Fort Worth, Texas
Level 4 Contributor

- 24 reviews
- 6 attraction reviews
- 33 helpful votes

“Excellent tour!”

★★★★★ Reviewed 1 week ago via mobile

We went on the extended 45 min tour and it was great! Our tour guide was Ben and he was very entertaining and knowledgeable. I had no idea how cool that little area is. It was well worth it. I would definitely recommend the longer "supersized" tour. And make a stop at the free aquarium as well!



Visited July 2016

Helpful? 1 Thank Jen L

Report

[Ask Jen L about The Meadows Center](#)

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.



Mythlandia
San Miguel de Allende,
Mexico

- Level 5 Contributor
- 80 reviews
 - 23 attraction reviews
 - 32 helpful votes

“Fun and Educational”

★★★★★ Reviewed June 5, 2016

We took their extended tour by "super-sizing" it for a 45 glass bottom boat tour of the natural springs which was well worth the extra money. Very relaxing. Loved the turtles and fish in the lake.

Helpful? Thank Mythlandia

Report

Additional Programming

- Family Fun Days
- Groundwater Festival
- Outreach Events
- New Outdoor Programs
- Partnering with the Mermaid Society SMTX

www.ExploreSpringLake.org



Family Fun Days at Spring Lake

MARCH 17	APRIL 14	MAY 12	JUNE 16
Go Green! World Water Family Fun Day	April Showers Spring Family Fun Day	Mother Earth Family Fun Day	Father Time Family Fun Day

Join us from **11am to 3pm** for a family-friendly event that's fun for all ages, featuring environmental activities and crafts. These events are **FREE** and **open to the public**.

For more information, visit FamilyFun.MeadowsWater.org or contact the Spring Lake Tour Office at 512.245.7540.

 **THE MEADOWS CENTER**
FOR WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

The Meadows Center's Family Fun Days are funded in part by The City of San Marcos 

TAKE IT, READ IT SAN MARCAN

INTRODUCING LIFE IN SAN MARCOS & TXST



MERMAIDS' RETURN
QUIRKY DOWNTOWN MINI-MURALS
BOOM TOWN
BOBCAT PREVIEW

PLAN YOUR FALL AROUND THE GREATEST EVENTS IN TOWN

+ AUGMENTED REALITY VIDEO



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THANK YOU

Visit www.explorespringlake.org for more info.



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