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DAUPHIN COUNTY'S WEEKLY COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

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# NATURE'S SCULPTURE



Nick Williams is a member of Living Willow, an organization that teaches willow sculpture in primary schools in England.

## Willow art workshop from Germany coming to Swatara Twp.'s Circle School

BY DIANE McCORMICK  
For The Patriot-News

Sculptor Claudia Feldhaus' works are in schools and private gardens throughout the German cities of Cologne, Bonn and Dueren.

But her works can't be transported to the U.S. because they are, quite literally, rooted in the earth. So the creator of living willow sculptures is coming here, to lead a workshop in her art at Circle School in Swatara Twp. on April 4.

Living willow sculptures, popular in Europe for

about two decades, are permanent, rooted structures woven from 8-foot-high willow branches. Structures include arbors and trellises, play tents and tunnels for children, and fence-hedge combinations known as "fedges."

Circle School parent Sonja Stroukoff suggested the workshop because she had seen living willow sculptures in her native Germany.

"Every preschool, every kindergarten — it's very, very common that they use natural materials for the

### IF YOU GO

Space is limited and registration is required for the living willow sculpture workshop, 10 a.m. April 4, Circle School, 210 Oakleigh Ave., Swatara Twp. Call 564-6700 for information.

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# CIRCLE: Willow sculpture workshop slated

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children to play with, to inspire their imagination," said Stroukoff, of Newberry Twp. "They make teepees, tunnels and igloos for wonderful imaginary play."

Workshop participants will build a half-dome and tunnel on the school grounds, said Circle School staffer Beth Stone. The sculpture will complement the school's educational philosophy, she said.

"We highly value play here at the Circle School, and the kids spend a lot of time outside playing," Stone said. "They build their own little fantasy fairy castles in the woods and trees. Visually, this kind of thing will fit perfectly in our playground, but

also the kids will take great advantage of it and use it for that kind of fantasy play. It's so appealing and alluring. I have a picture of the design on my desktop, and kids say, 'Oh my gosh, that's so cool.'"

When Stroukoff couldn't find a local living willow supplier, she made a backyard teepee from branches and vines scrounged from the woods. It's a favorite spot for her 4-year-old son and neighborhood kids — better than manufactured play sets, she said.

"You have a slide and you have monkey bars, and then it's sort of a given what you do with the monkey bars, what you do with the slide," she said. "But if you have an igloo or a tunnel, they make green classrooms out of

these things. They run their own games. They let their imaginations soar and make up role games. It's completely spontaneous. Scientifically, it grows more neurological connections."

Stroukoff didn't know Feldhaus in Germany, but the artist accepted Stroukoff's invitation to come to the states and conduct a workshop at Circle School. Feldhaus said she first learned living willow sculpture in 2000.

Children "are fascinated by willows," Feldhaus said in an e-mail. "It is some sort of positive energy they give to us. If children can decide between willow objects and a play object from a catalogue, they always prefer willows. Every time. Willow sculptures make us relax. I think it

is something in our heart."

Bryce Davis, owner of the Plant Place in Lower Paxton and Londonderry townships, helped Stroukoff procure willows for the workshop from a Washington-state nursery. He had never heard of living willow sculptures, but now he's planting his own willows and plans to become the area's first supplier, he said.

Living willow sculptures can control erosion, and they can shelter humans while also harboring birds and butterflies, Davis said.

"I see it lending itself well with organic gardens," said Davis, who's making his business all-organic. "We can make structures like a trellis to grow other things on. It'll probably lend itself to a rain

garden for pollution and runoff control. The only thing I don't know is how invasive it's going to be. I have to do some further research on that."

Feldhaus always involves children in her workshops, giving them ownership in the structure and incentive to help with the occasional watering and trimming needed, Stroukoff said. She hopes to see living willow sculptures take root in the region.

"My main focus is about bringing people closer to nature and showing people this is what you can do," Stroukoff said. "You can make a beautiful fence out of these willows. You don't need a plastic fence. You don't need chain link. You can make arches for your yard. It's endless, the possibilities."