

The History of the Evergreen Heritage Center Foundation

The Evergreen Heritage Center (EHC), located on 130 acres of Federal Hill in the heart of Western Maryland, is an historic farm that pre-dates the Revolutionary War. The property has been on the Maryland Historical Trust inventory of properties since 1976 and was added to the National Register in April 2015. The EHC features a six bedroom farmhouse and barn originally built more than 200 years ago, plus over 100 acres of managed forest, multiple gardens and orchards, and beautifully landscaped grounds, all in a picturesque location bordering the Great Allegheny Passage and Western Maryland Scenic Railway. The EHC is not only an historic treasure but it also embodies the concept of "living off the land" while preserving it for use by future generations. The EHC is twenty minutes from Cumberland, 90 minutes from Hagerstown, and roughly two and a half hours from Washington D.C., Baltimore, or Pittsburgh.

The Evergreen Heritage Center Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) public charity, was founded in 2008 to utilize the Evergreen Heritage Center (EHC) to provide experiential learning opportunities in a region where the median household income is only 54% of the median State-wide and 75% of its elementary school children qualify for the USDA Free and Reduced Meal program.

In 2008, to begin pursuing its mission in education, the EHC Foundation partnered with Frostburg State University (FSU), Allegany College of Maryland (ACM), and Allegany County Public Schools (ACPS) to commission a Feasibility Study to determine the need for and viability of a collaborative venture that would leverage the EHC for experiential learning. The Study identified over 100 courses at FSU and ACM that could utilize the EHC to provide hands-on learning for students. These courses spanned the arts, sciences, business, and education. For ACPS, teachers wanted to use the EHC venue for field trips. In addition, the Study identified outreach organizations such as Head Start that wanted to join the partnership.

Before the Study was even completed, Study interviews resulted in requests for field trips to the site. As a result, two EHC programs were born. The first was Higher Education and Research, which began with FSU science students performing an environmental analysis of the property. This course established the policy of requiring all students to produce a professional quality work product. The second program resulting from the Study was an outreach program for Project Head Start children and Salvation Army youth that provided field trip activities conducted by professionals with FSU and ACM education majors assisting and thereby gaining field experience. The following year, ACPS piloted EHC field trips for 7th grade students. Success was measured using pre/post tests on the science subject covered during the field trips. The goal was a 25% improvement in literacy on the topic; students achieved almost 50%. As a result, the EHC K-12 program was established. Now, each year 200 to 300 college students use the EHC for experiential education and more than 4000 pre-K to grade 12 students participate in EHC field trips, after school, and in-school programs.