



Christodora-Manice Education Center Information 2010



I. Background

The Manice Education Center (“MEC”) is an operation of the Christodora Foundation of New York City (“Christodora”). Christodora was founded as a nonsectarian, youth-oriented settlement house on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1897 and remains involved in camping programs, primarily for New York City youth, since 1908. The Manice Education Center originated from a Board of Directors decision to run a small, high-quality residential center with a strong emphasis on environmental education and wilderness programs.

Christodora also designs and operates environmental education programs in and around the New York City area. These programs, designed to complement programs at the Manice Education Center, offer students additional in depth learning opportunities along a continuum of involvement.

Students who participate in summer courses at MEC can continue their growth and learning through participation in various Christodora after-school programs in New York City. Scholarships for advanced studies in ecology, research and other exciting environmental programs are also available for select program graduates.

II. Location

The Manice Education Center is located in the small town of Florida, Massachusetts (seven miles from North Adams) in the Hoosac Mountain range of northern Berkshire County. The surrounding countryside is almost entirely state forest land; the area abounds in lakes, streams, hiking trails and unbroken stretches of forest. This landscape lends itself perfectly to our primary programs directions: environmental and wilderness education.

III. Goals

The goals of the Manice Education Center, as with all Christodora programs, are to offer youth from economically disadvantaged families in New York City a range of environmental and wilderness programs designed to increase their knowledge and understanding of the natural world and to challenge them to develop their self-confidence and leadership skills.

MEC’s environmental and adventure programs challenge students, stimulate personal growth and enhance responsibility. The process of learning and the excitement inherent in these activities encourage the spirit of cooperation and self-confidence, and guide participants toward a broader understanding of themselves, their environment and community.

IV. Programs

Our spring (May – June) and fall (September – October) sessions consist primarily of three-day field trips for students in grades six through twelve from many New York City school districts and Christodora programs.

The summer program includes four sessions of environmental science, wilderness and leadership training courses for students ages 11 through 18. Each course lasts from one to three weeks. Students take specific courses based on age, maturity and prior experience. The course progression provides motivated students a sequence of outdoor learning and growth opportunities over several years.

All students in the summer courses are chosen based on teachers’ recommendations and an interview with Christodora staff. Recommendations are based on motivation, enthusiasm for learning in the out-of-doors and lack of comparable opportunities.

Group size at the Manice Center is about 40 students per session. We maintain sufficient program staff to offer an excellent student to staff ratio averaging 6:1. We are thereby able to offer close supervision and attention to the needs of each individual student.

The Center’s primary activities are:

1) Environmental Studies

For all students we provide classes in forest, aquatic, and soil ecosystems, wildlife observation, wild edible plants, astronomy and a variety of other lessons. Activities are “hands on,” and designed to stimulate excitement, discovery and learning. MEC’s forest location and access to an abundance of natural communities are an extraordinary resource for our nature program.

2) Wilderness Skills & Expeditions

Hiking, backpacking and canoeing are central activities. Nearly all the students from the visiting schools participate in half-day hiking trips or canoeing trips. Summer course participants engage in rigorous expeditions ranging from three to six days on the trail or along the waterway. Backpacking expeditions often take place on the Appalachian Trail in the Berkshires or in the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. Canoe trips run on Berkshire and Vermont streams and, for older students, on lakes and rivers in the Adirondacks.

Before an expedition, the students practice canoeing (extensively), camping skills and orienteering and safety procedures. Comprehensive safety training (for staff and students) is fundamental to all activities.

As a prelude to all trips, students participate in a vital team-building and problem-solving program on our extensive “Teams Course” of group initiatives and challenges. Groups must plan carefully, communicate effectively and cooperate to make decisions that will affect the group’s safety and success.

3) **Leadership Training**

The leadership training portion of our program, adapted from portions of the Wilderness Education Association (WEA) curriculum, helps to direct highly motivated youth toward leadership roles in our society through the development and refinement of leadership skills. Included are both theoretical and practical applications of leadership and group dynamics models. Activities include learning leadership styles, goal setting, group processes, judgment/decision making, and role modeling. This component may also include community service work as an opportunity to experience working cooperatively and unselfishly to achieve socially beneficial results.

Each year several students who have demonstrated exemplary leadership skills are hired to assist the instructional staff the following summer as Wilderness Trip Assistants.

4) **Organic Gardening**

The Center has a large organic garden that supplies the Center with vegetables in July and August. Everyone helps to plant, cultivate, and harvest. The garden is a central focus for teaching the natural interrelationships between people and the earth.

5) **Other Activities**

In brief, supplementary programs include: swimming (in summer, this is a major activity), sports, arts and crafts, games, special field days, skits, campfires and talent shows.

V. **Staff**

The spring and fall program staff consists of a Director, an Assistant Director and six instructional staff. Summer staff includes the spring and fall program staff plus one to two Wilderness Program Coordinators, three to four Wilderness Trip Assistants and two additional instructional staff. Staff members are selected based on outdoor teaching experience, environmental knowledge, safety training, enthusiasm, warmth and sensitivity in working with adolescents. Staff members are college graduate (Field

Teachers/Environmental Educators) or MEC alumni/college students (seasonal interns) with a strong commitment to teaching and outdoor education. To ensure the safety of our students, MEC carries out a criminal history background check, sex offender record check, previous employment reference check, and a medical physical on all potential employees.

Manice Education Center staff training gives instructional personnel comprehensive instruction and practice in interpretation, outdoor leadership and wilderness skills.

VI. **Facilities**

As described in the brochure our building and tents are simple and rustic (yet comfortable), in keeping with the outdoor experience. The farmhouse, our main building (built in the early 1800’s), contains a modern kitchen, infirmary, laundry and shower facilities. The science building, constructed in 1982, provides an important indoor work space for research and supplies.

Students and instructional staff live in large (16 ft. x 20 ft.) cabin-style tents made from canvas and elevated on wooden platforms. Each tent – four each for boys and girls – has space for up to seven students and one staff member, but averages only 5-6 students in the tent. The boys’ and girls’ washhouse (with toilets and sinks) is situated near the tents; showers are taken and laundry is washed on a regular schedule in the farmhouse.

The Manice Education Center facilities meet or exceed all applicable Massachusetts Health and Safety Standards. MEC is inspected and licensed on an annual basis by the Health Department, Building Codes Inspector, & Fire Codes Inspector of the Town of Florida, Massachusetts.

VII. **Tuition and Funding**

The total cost to operate the facility presently ranges from an average of \$224/student for a three-day public school field trip to an average of \$1200/student for those enrolled in the nineteen-day summer courses. Visiting schools pay a flat fee and summer course tuition is on a sliding scale based on family income, AFDC eligibility, sponsorship from outside agencies and financial aid from Christodora’s donors. Transportation to and from the Center is included in all costs.

Christodora receives funding for the Manice Education Center from individual and corporate donations, foundation grants and visitation fees.

We hope that this bulletin answers questions about the Manice Education Center. If you need more information, please contact us at the Manice Education Center, 68 Savoy Road, Florida, MA 01247, Phone (413) 663-8463; Fax (413)663-5399; email: manice@christodora.org ; or visit www.christodora.org