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Media Contact

Cindy Hassil, Ljams Development Director
chassil@ljams.org / 865-577-4717, ext. 1006

Ljams Nature Center Celebrates 50 Years at Homecoming Event Nov. 8

(KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, 10/21/25)—Ljams Nature Center will celebrate 50 years of being a nonprofit organization dedicated to nature, education, and stewardship at an Ljams Homecoming on Saturday, Nov. 8, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

This free event will feature fun, hands-on activities for all ages, historic materials, guided hikes, refreshments, and more at the Ljams Visitor Center, 2915 Island Home Ave. in South Knoxville.

“This is a special milestone for Ljams Nature Center,” Ljams President and CEO Amber Parker said. “We’re celebrating 50 years of continuing the legacy of respect, wonder, and protection H.P. and Alice Ljams began more than a century ago when they bought 20 acres along the Tennessee River to raise their family.

“Ljams’ story weaves across generations,” she continued. “It began as one family’s homesite and gardens, grew into a bird sanctuary, became a small park, and is now one of the most visited nature education centers in the country. Today, Ljams serves more than 620,000 visitors each year on 320 acres featuring a lake, ponds, river access, climbing, miles of trails for hiking and mountain biking, a visitor center, and engaging educational programs.”

A short program from 10:30-11a.m. will feature remarks from past Executive Directors Bo Townsend and Paul James, Parker, and City of Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon.

The celebration will also include a silent auction of art created by some of the nature center’s animal ambassadors. Winning bidders will receive the art, a photo of the animal that painted it, and a story card about that animal.

Ljams Animal Program Coordinator Savannah Blackman took care to use non-toxic, water-based paint that was easy to remove when the artists created their work.

“Ljams’ three-legged female Eastern box turtle, Trinity, was on a “roll” for her artwork, wheeling across her canvas on her skateboard, which she uses to increase mobility during enrichment programs,” Blackman said. “Her travels on the Visitor Center Plaza have attracted quite a crowd each time she’s exercising. Folks love to see her zooming!”

Ijams also plans to have a contest to name an animal ambassador homecoming queen or king and their court. Attendees may purchase a “vote” ticket for \$1 to help support the care of these non-releasable educators, which costs about \$20,000 annually.

People who donate \$50 for Ijams’ 50th anniversary or become a new member at the event or by the end of the year will receive a special Ijams Nature Center sticker.

“We hope to see former staff, volunteers, and board members joining the fun with current staff and other Ijams fans,” Parker said. “They all played a part in Ijams becoming what it is today. We’re all part of this story.”

One former Ijams senior naturalist will be there: Stephen Lyn Bales, a beloved local educator, artist, and author, will present a program, “What Children in Nature Can Teach Us,” from 11:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

Naturalist-led guided hikes will be at 12 p.m. and 1 p.m.

The Ijams Nature Preschool is hosting an alumni homecoming and picnic for current and former students and their families at the Ijams Homesite that afternoon.

The Ijams Homecoming is free to attend, but registration is requested to help with planning. For more information and to RSVP, visit ijams.org/50-years-of-stories.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025, Ijams Nature Center is a 320-acre nonprofit educational center in the heart of Knoxville that serves visitors of all ages, stages, and abilities. Its mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Ijams features 14 miles of hiking and mixed-use trails, a public access river dock, swimming, boating, biking, and so much more. Hundreds of world-class educational programs and events are coordinated and offered annually. Ijams’ grounds and trails are open every day from 8 a.m. until dusk. For more information, visit ijams.org or call 865-577-4717.

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