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Shutdown prompts quick clean up of Shirley Heinze property



Peter Gizyn, of Chicago, and Lynda Lancaster, of Chesterton, clean windows Wednesday at the Shirley Heinze Land Trust Meadowbrook Conservation Center and Nature Preserve, a former Girl Scout camp. They joined other volunteers in preparing cabins for students from Munster's Frank Hammond School. The students were originally scheduled to take part the Dunes Learning Center's program, usually housed at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Because of the partial federal government shutdown, the cabins used by Dunes Center Learning cabins are not accessible. Some of the volunteers, including Lancaster who works for the National Park Service, are furloughed government workers.

LIBERTY TOWNSHIP | The government shutdown prompted an army of volunteers to descend Wednesday on the Shirley Heinze Land Trust Meadowbrook Conservation Center and Preserve.

Their mission was to prepare the former Girl Scout Camp for campers taking part in the Dunes Learning Center program, which is normally housed at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

The government shutdown has meant the DLC program has had to operate elsewhere.

The DLC is a private, nonprofit organization.

Jim Erdelac, education volunteer manager for Shirley Heinze Land Trust, said the volunteers were prepping cabins that have had little or no use since the land trust purchased the property from the Girl Scouts, which retired the facility in 2011.

He said dozens of volunteers were busy cleaning, repairing and painting cabins and performing other work at the property.

"It's for the kids, we just kept it going," said Geoff Benson, executive director of the Dunes Learning Center said. "We weren't going to let the government shut us down."

The outdoor learning program that typically caters to fourth- to sixth-grade students has adapted by shifting its program sites to locations "outside the park boundaries."



Volunteers pitched in Wednesday to help clean and prepare the former Girl Scout camp at the Shirley Heinze Land Trust Meadowbrook Conservation Center and Nature Preserve for students from Munster's Frank Hammond School.