

OUTSIDE

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Nichols' support, says Kagle, "helped cover the rent and keep the lights on" for its first three years.

But with Nichols' annual pledges now reaching an end, unless \$20,000 estimated yearly overheads can be raised and raised quickly, The Get Outside Center could find itself out on the street. And for the thousands of local kids it annually serves through 21 schools, camps and programs, the loss of that natural resource would, says natural born "critter kid" Rick Roth, be hard to put a price on.

For Kagle — as for Roth, who describes himself as "Cape Ann's most non-profitable non-profit" — money has never been a driver. Other than sharing space, the two nonprofits operate financially independently of each other, and the center's financial struggles are all too familiar to some of the city's most cherished nonprofits, including Backyard Growers and Art Haven, both of which must constantly raise money to "keep the lights on" in their popular downtown spaces.

What makes all the work worth it, says Roth, "is the look on those kids faces when they see a salamander, and for them, in that moment, there is nothing else in the world but that salamander."

Roth—Cape Ann's answer to Australia's late, great Steve Irwin and a Peter Pan to Jessica Kagle's Wendy—says he has "never grown up and never intends to." He caught his first snake as a kindergartner in his native Illinois, and has kept that childish thrall with all things creepy crawly alive for as long as he's been alive.



Jessica Kagle, founder and program director at Kestrel Outdoor Adventures, looks out from the front window of the Get Outside Center at 186 Main Street in Gloucester, which faces possible closure due to a lack of funding.

MIKE SPRINGER/Staff photos

Now 65, when reached last week by phone, he was out in the woods looking for — what else? — snakes and salamanders. That, adds Roth, is how and where Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team got started in the first place. "We were out watching for salamanders and we met some people in the swamp and said, 'Hey, what are you doing?' — and they were doing the same thing, and then there were others and then we all said, 'Hey let's all get together,' and the Vernal Pond Team was born."

In the 26 years since, Roth has been introducing countless kids to the vital ecosystem of Cape Ann's vernal ponds and the world of wildlife that inhabits them, and bringing the great outdoors inside local libraries, classrooms and nature centers with his traveling menagerie of critters, about a dozen of which — including snakes,

frogs, turtles and salamanders — are in residence at the The Get Outside Center; one of the many attractions, along with books, binoculars, boots, butterfly nets — all together \$10,000 worth of equipment and outdoor gear — available either for free or on loan for a small annual fee.

Roth, whose ultimate dream is opening a wildlife sanctuary, finances his team independently, like Kagle, but says that the center has been an asset to both. To lose it, he says, "would be a giant step backwards for both of us." Actually, the two have shared space together before, first at the Cape Ann Business Incubator, and later in Magnolia. But, says Kagle, "that was really just a place to store stuff." The Main Street location "took things to a whole new level."

"I think it's easy," says

Kagle, "for community members to think we'll always be here. But that just isn't so. If they'll support us,



Five-year-old Audrey McAllister examines a young painted turtle Thursday at the Get Outside Center on Main Street in Gloucester

we'll support them." Donations of any size are welcome, and Kagle, who has launched a crowdfunding page at Worthwild.com, says that time is of the essence.

Donors may contribute at www.worthwild.com/initiatives/70 or kestreleducation.org/donate/

More information is

available by stopping in at The Get Out Center, 196 Mains St., or contacting Kestrel Educational Adventures founder and program director Jessica Kagle at 978-515-7177 or jessica@kestreleducation.org

Staff writer Joann MacKenzie may be contacted at 978-675-2707, or jomackenzie@gloucestertimes.com.

CATA CAPE ANN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY STUDENT BUS PASSES WILL BE SOLD AT GLOUCESTER HIGH SCHOOL ATRIUM

August 23rd, 24th & 25th - 1:00PM to 4:00PM

August 28th - 10:00AM to 4:00PM

August 29th, 30th & 31st Lunch Blocks to 4:00PM

For More Information Call 978-283-7278

At Gloucester High School in the atrium (inside the front entrance to the school)

Cape Ann Transportation Authority