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## **FIVE STUDENTS TO GRADUATE FROM WILDERNESS AT THE SMOKIES PROJECT SEARCH JOB TRAINING PROGRAM**

SEVIERVILLE, Tenn. – Friday, May 10, is going to be a big day for five high school students from around the area.

That is the day they will graduate from the Project Search Job Training Program at Wilderness at the Smokies. The ceremony will be held at 10 am in the Deep Creek Meeting Room at Stone Hill Lodge.

The Project Search Program with The Access Program was a six-month pilot program that Wilderness at the Smokies volunteered to participate in for the 2018-2019 school year. The goal of the program was to provide job training to high school students who are finishing up their last year before graduation.

The five students who were chosen to participate in this year's pilot program attend four different area high schools. They had to meet educational guidelines and go through an application process to be selected for the program.

According to Trish Cook, talent acquisition manager and business liaison for project search at Wilderness at the Smokies, "When we were approached by Project Search about starting this job program onsite, we embraced it thinking that it would be a great way to give back to the community and give some students an opportunity they may not otherwise have to learn important new skills for their future."

"What we didn't realize is how much we would get out of it. The participants in Project Search have really touched all of our hearts in a special way. It has been

an absolutely wonderful experience to see them grow and their confidence sky rocket.”

The students began their work experience at Wilderness at the Smokies on in January by training in various areas of the resort. They then got to pick their favorite area, apply to be an intern in that department, and work there for 8 weeks. Then the students were assigned to a second area for another 8 weeks.

On a typical school day, the students arrive at resort at 8:00 am. They start their day with a lesson addressing life and work skills with their teacher and onsite mentors, then work from 9 am – 2 pm, and then finish the day meeting with their teacher and mentors again to recap their current day’s experience.

According to Cook the students have learned some really valuable life skills and work experience. In housekeeping, they were taught how to strip down the rooms, change sheets and towels, remove trash and vacuum guest rooms; as lobby attendants they focused on dusting and vacuuming the resort’s public areas; as prep chefs they were taught how to make yogurt parfaits and cut up vegetables for breakfast and lunch; and as aquatics housekeepers they learned how to fold towels.”

The last couple of weeks as part of their end of day recap the students have also been shown how to fill out job applications for various jobs. Of the five students in the pilot Project Search program four have expressed an interest to become employees of the Wilderness at the Smokies. One will be returning to the Project Search program again next school year to further develop their skills.

According to Jennifer Jeffers, Educational Transition Specialist for Project Search, “The managers, employees, and especially mentors at Wilderness at the Smokies have been welcoming and supportive. Our interns have really advanced their interpersonal skills and work experience. We are so incredibly proud of them.”

Cook says Wilderness at the Smokies has enjoyed being part of the Project Search program so much they are hoping to have 10-12 students in program for the 2019-2020 school year. “Our employees have really liked having them around and the experience has been positive for everyone.”

Cook adds that she hopes more businesses in the area will participate in the program next year.

“It’s a win/win situation for everyone.”

For more information on Project Search, please contact Roberta Dix, [robertadix@sevier.org](mailto:robertadix@sevier.org) or Jennifer Jeffers, [jenniferjeffers@sevier.org](mailto:jenniferjeffers@sevier.org)

Wilderness at the Smokies is the Smoky Mountain region's largest waterpark resort and family entertainment center. It is located in Sevierville, TN, and is situated in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, whose famous national park is the most popular in the United States welcoming over 11 million visitors a year.

The resort features 234 Stone Hill guest rooms; 472 River Lodge suites and 7 Villas; an 84-degree, year-round indoor waterpark; two seasonal outdoor waterparks; an indoor family entertainment center; a variety of dining and shopping options; a 36-hole championship golf course; and more than 200,000 square feet of meeting and convention space. It is owned by Wilderness Resort and Waterparks, a Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin-based hotel and hospitality development and management company which also operates Wilderness Resort, Glacier Canyon Lodge, Wilderness on the Lake and Sundara Spa all in Wisconsin Dells.

Wilderness at the Smokies has created hundreds of jobs in the greater Sevierville community, attracting year-round tourism, and having a major impact on sales tax and room tax generated for the City of Sevierville since opening its doors in 2008. For more information visit [WildernessattheSmokies.com](http://WildernessattheSmokies.com) or call 877.325.9453.