Report to the Community

### EMERGE

SEPTEMBER 1, 2020 - AUGUST 31, 2021





## Dear Friends,

It seems in the blink of an eye, our fiveyear capital campaign, *Enhancing Your Outdoor Classroom*, has come to an end. We have emerged!

After previous years' enhancements, including the new Lavelle Family Amphitheater and the rebuilt and improved All People's Trail, this year brought our complete vision of a restored and reinvigorated outdoor classroom to life with:

- The full renovation and restoration of the Stearns Woodland Trail.
- The new Carfagna Family Nature Play Area.
- The construction and grand opening of Jimmy's Treehouse.
- The creation of more welcoming neighborhood trailheads connecting to West Park and South Park Boulevards.
- The building of a new Sustainability Hub and parking lot enhancements.
- The final phase of a multi-faceted habitat restoration project across our 20 acres, improving the quality of habitats on our site, creating a more biologically diverse ecosystem for wildlife to thrive, visitors to enjoy, and students to study.

These amazing new trails and features are now enjoyed by our community every day and will help future generations to develop deeper connections with the natural world.

As we emerge from our campaign, we can now admire the transformed space. What was once a lovely, but somewhat outdated site, is now an active destination, attracting school groups and visitors of all ages and abilities. Our campaign team poured their hearts and souls into this work. Everyone from staff, to our campaign committee, to the members of our Board of Trustees should feel extremely proud of what we accomplished. With their leadership, and the support of our entire community coming together to help us exceed our \$6.1M fundraising goal, we completed the campaign on time and on budget!

We also must acknowledge the extraordinary work of our staff and volunteers who, while navigating a global pandemic, maintained our momentum and kept us operating safely and successfully throughout. Although the pandemic is still at the forefront of so many people's lives and has affected our daily routines in profound ways, we adjusted to a new normal here

at the Nature Center and continued to serve our community and steward our precious habitat. This past spring, we held our 37th Annual Plant Sale which broke sales records and inspired those in our community to learn about native gardening, creating diverse native ecosystems in their own backyards. In May, we hosted an extremely successful Annual Benefit. After over a year of online, virtual events, Nature at Night was one of the first large in-person gatherings in the region, and guests enjoyed reconnecting with friends safely outdoors while supporting our mission and annual operations. We also welcomed back summer campers and the squeals of curious children throughout our property was a delightful sound. What a year!

Much like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis symbolizes a rebirth and transformation—we, too, feel as though the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes has emerged. We have emerged from a global crisis throughout which we continued to provide an important and safe place for outdoor education, respite, and mental health. We have emerged from a major restoration of our outdoor classroom—stronger, more resiliant, and more connected to the community we serve. This year, however, was very special and symbolic. We feel renewed and revived, and ready to spread our wings.

Thank you for your continued support, which allows us to fulfill our mission each and every year.

With gratitude,

KAY CARLSON

Kay Carlon

**PRESIDENT & CEO** 

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KAREN KIDWELL

CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES



# Environmental Education Programming Pushes Through Pandemic





#### by Erica Prange, Director of Education

This past year brought many challenges, but we continued reaching students by transforming our environmental education curriculum into a virtual experience. Without the Nature Center building to use for classroom space from March 2020 to May 2021, we were at a disadvantage. However, our virtual video series of nature scavenger hunts and outdoor observation challenges encouraged students to explore outside in their own neighborhoods or school yards. Students were also invited to enjoy the Nature Center trails in person with friends or family. The Nature Center trails, streams, and even birds all made appearances in the videos' carefully curated programming as we connected the observations staff were making at the Nature Center to outdoor explorations the students could do from home.

Thanks to generous support from donors, students from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District were able to receive tools to use during these programs. PreK, K and 1st grade CMSD teachers were given a set of magnifying lenses and a book for their classrooms, while students participating in the Environmental Educator in Residence Program (an intensive, 20-program series) received backpacks filled with materials to be used, like thermometers, owl pellets, and tweezers.

As the 2021 Outdoor Adventure Camp season approached, the months spent researching the best COVID safety practices paid off as we welcomed children back to the Nature Center for the first time in over a year. Childrens' footsteps and laughter became a regular part of the Nature Center again, and the trails were full of campers rolling logs, splashing in the stream, searching for wildlife, and even helping with habitat restoration efforts. In addition to our traditional Outdoor Adventure Camps, we also launched new programming, including single-day "pop-up" camps and summer enrichment programming in partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Despite its challenges, 2021 gave us excellent opportunities to creatively reimagine our programming and savor those moments that make us remember why what we do is so important.

## Fostering a Connection to Nature Through Play









Trail Visits

Family & Adult Education Program Attendees Increase in Visits to Stearns Woodland Trail

#### By Alexandria Yurosko, Content Marketing Manager

As an increasingly digital society moves children and families indoors, the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes' (NCSL) mission hinges on reversing that shift by creating opportunities for everyone to connect with nature. In 2020–2021 during the height of the pandemic, the Nature Center saw a significant increase in outdoor visitor traffic. Families were seeking safe, fun opportunities and NCSL was able to provide that. During this time, NCSL staff and leadership were intent and remained focused on using this new resurgence in love for the outdoors to push forward with the capital improvements planned through our recent campaign.

There is ample research to demonstrate engaging in nature has huge health benefits, especially for children, so a Nature Play Area was a clear priority to support our mission. Unstructured nature play and outdoor experiences "positively impacts children's cognitive development, along with influencing outcomes related to physical activity, fitness levels, motor skills, social skills, emotional well-being, and creativity." (Psychology Today, 2020).

Through the support of the capital campaign, the Carfagna Family Nature Play Area opened late summer 2021 as an inviting space to encourage creativity and free nature play. Easily accessed from the Stearns Woodland Trailhead, the Nature Play Area and adjacent streamside deck features spiral stump hoppers, balance beams built from sturdy branches, and a section of a 300 year-old Moses White Oak Tree that had fallen in a recent microburst for observation and exploration. Elements also include various natural structures and movable materials and provide a place for children to actively engage and play in nature.

In addition to the Nature Play Area, children more deeply engage with nature through the beloved creek walks during summer camp and through classes held at the Nature Center on topics such as water quality, biodiversity, and other hands-on lessons.

## Building Community through Annual Events





Raised through Fundraising Events

Plant Sale Orders

Nature at Night Attendees

by Rosalind Soltow, Membership & Development Operations Manager

The Nature Center is so much more than its building and 20 acres. It's an entire community of advocates, donors, members, volunteers, and visitors who support our mission through contributions, participation, and attendance year over year. Creating lasting relationships with this network of supporters enables us to work together to accomplish our shared goals of providing environmental education and preserving nature. The pandemic made strengthening those relationships more challenging, but the Nature Center took advantage of the opportunity to forge new connections and strengthen relationships with the return of in-person events.

The Hike, Run & Fun event in September 2020 offered the community one of the year's only inperson 5K races and featured socially-distanced hikes for youth and adults. In addition to supporting our ongoing operations, a portion of the event's proceeds supports the Jenny Goldman Fund, which helps underwrite the Nature Center's environmental education programs.

We safely held our 37th Annual Plant Sale in May. With the resurgence of interest in gardening, we were thrilled to help both novice and seasoned gardeners discover the importance of planting native species. We were overwhelmed when our online catalog sale sold out in just two weeks, and seeing and greeting our shoppers on Plant Sale Day warmed our hearts. Additional donations to the Plant Sale were designated toward the Barber Habitat Restoration Fund, which supports the comprehensive restoration of our habitats.

In June, our annual benefit, Nature at Night, was a great success. After hosting it virtually in 2020, the return of this year's in-person event was extra special. Guests gathered together for an evening of culinary favorites, crafted cocktails, and good conversation with friends. We heard countless times from guests how happy they were to finally be able to come together again for a common cause.

Through individual donations, foundation support, corporate sponsorships, ticket and ad sales, and registration fees, we raised the critical funds needed to facilitate the Nature Center's education programs, habitat preservation, and ongoing operations. We are grateful for the generous and steadfast support of our entire network of supporters over the past year.

## Team Effort to Continue Conservation Work





Hours Spent on Conservation/Stewardship

Acres of Invasive Species Removed

Native Species Planted

Conservation is a core pillar of the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes' mission, and each year Natural Resources Manager Nick Mikash works to promote sustainable habitats across our 20 acres of land. While Nick and his team work hard, their significant progress this year wouldn't have been possible without donor support, many volunteers, and a Summer Stewardship Intern.

A critical grant from the Cyrus Eaton Foundation enabled the Nature Center to hire a Summer Stewardship Intern, Owen Barnard, who worked 300 hours during the summer of 2021. Owen assisted with the restoration of floodplain forest, shrub swamp, upland forest, and riverine marsh habitat surrounding the Stearns Woodland Trail.

The Stewardship Intern position allowed to us exceed our goals for this growing season, helping us to plant 2,210 native trees, shrubs, and perennials throughout a 12-acre area. Owen led groups of Summer Stewardship Volunteers to remove invasive species, plant native trees and shrubs, and maintain these new plantings by watering and erecting deer fencing. He also led volunteers in other important projects, such as maintaining our trails and picking up 50 pounds of trash from our site and the Doan Brook corridor.

In addition, Volunteer Coordinator Jeanette Moore was able to safely maintain volunteer programs for the Nature Center following health guidelines from the CDC. The work of NCSL staff, volunteers, and the Stewardship Intern during the 2021 growing season contributed to a larger, multi-year effort to restore the habitat on our 20-acre property. Since 2019, we have removed approximately five acres of invasive shrubs and installed over 6,300 native plants.

We have secured a grant from the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to plant 1,000 trees this coming spring. Thanks to our Stewardship Intern, we were able to clear invasive species in the areas where these trees are slated to be planted. Next summer, our Stewardship Intern will be focused on planting trees in areas dominated by beech trees that are vulnerable to beech leaf disease.

As you walk our trails this winter, look for potted shrubs, live stakes (which look like sticks, but will grow into shrubs), and perennials. Removing invasive plants will allow native species to re-establish over time, and we do this gradually to ensure there is usable habitat for animals who need it now.

## Thank You

to the many volunteers who gave of their time and energy in support of our mission during the past year.

We are extremely appreciative of your service!









525+

Unique Volunteers (including Trustees)

Total Volunteer Hours Value of Volunteer Time

\$129,025

Trustee Hours Volunteered





VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

IAN ASHTON



Chase Sloan, a junior at Hawken School started with us as a four-year-old camper and began volunteering with our Outdoor Adventure Camp at 13 years old. Every summer, Chase's dedication to inspiring, encouraging, and helping campers to have fun while respecting the environment shines through. This summer we had lots of first-time teen volunteers and Chase took time to share great tips and advice with them. When not volunteering at the Nature Center, Chase is baking cakes and raising money for cancer research as the author of a recipe book, "Cakes for Cancer."

"This summer was really special, it was nice to come back after not seeing kids and being in the Nature Center for a year. I loved seeing all these little kids that were excited to be back, enjoying nature and camp, even with changes for COVID safety. It has been good to see the Nature Center with all the new adaptations and it was almost like it was new to me as well!"

"It has been good to see the Nature Center with all new adaptations...

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lan Ashton, a service missionary majoring in biology, began volunteering for the Nature Center in spring 2021. Right away, Ian volunteered twice a week as a Stewardship Assistant and a Trail Ambassador, adding Nature Guide not long after. When assisting with stewardship, Ian gives 110%, regardless of the project and enjoys learning more about the environment as he helps to care for it. Ian then, with a smile, hits the trails and shares some of that knowledge: helping us create a warm and welcoming atmosphere for our visitors. In addition to volunteering for the Nature Center, Ian volunteers for his church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints with hunger and literacy initiatives.

"One day when we were working on bark stripping in the Nature Play Area, we found an interesting caterpillar and Nick Mikash identified it as a tussock moth caterpillar. Looking back, it was a moment of hard work and sweat, but it impressed me that Nick had the patience and took the time to identify and teach us about this caterpillar. This story embodies for me what's so great about the Nature Center, a lot of effort goes into the work we do, but we still take time to appreciate the beauty of the nature that is all around us."

"...a lot of effort goes into the work we do, but we still take time to appreciate the beauty..." 99

## Evergreen Society— In Memoriam





The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes recently lost two close friends and long-time supporters who leave behind a legacy of leadership and service to our community and the environment.

A life-long Clevelander, Marjorie "Marge" Drollinger raised her family in Shaker Heights. As one of the original "Ladies in Tennis Shoes," she helped establish the Nature Center after winning the Clark Freeway fight. Marge took on many responsibilities at the Nature Center over the years, including joining the Board of Trustees, managing the Duck Pond Gift Shop, and serving on several committees. In recognition of her impact, Marge was named an Honorary Life Trustee in 2007.

Kathryn "Kitty" Makley also raised her family in Shaker Heights. Active with numerous causes in the area, Kitty first became involved with the Nature Center as a volunteer and ultimately served on the Board of Trustees from 1991-2007. During her term as Board President, she initiated the Nature Center's major fundraising events. Most recently, Kitty's dedication led her to serve on the committee for our recent Enhancing Your Outdoor Classroom capital campaign.

In addition to their ongoing support over the decades, Kitty and Marge understood the importance of leaving a lasting legacy for the environment and the future of our park. As members of our Evergreen Society, they both included the Nature Center in their estate plans.

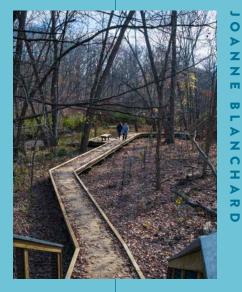
Joining the Evergreen Society is a wonderful way to ensure the Nature Center continues to be a vibrant part of our community for generations to come. To learn more about planned giving opportunities, please contact Rob Sikora, Chief Development Officer at 216.321.5935 ext. 223 or sikora@shakerlakes.org.



### Thank You

supported this vision. Together, we built the future of the

"Extraordinary! I really like the new improvements. They create access for all, while preserving the integrity of the natural landscape. The Fall Festival was a fun event for families and friends of the Nature Center. Thank goodness for this park! This is quite inspirational."



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#### **MEMBERS SINCE 2018**

"The kids have really enjoyed playing in the treehouse. It's such fun to feel like you're in the middle of a forest amongst all the beautiful foliage!"



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#### **MEMBER SINCE 2017**

#### Welcome Desk Volunteer

"The Gazebo is probably my favorite feature. It's beauty, uniqueness, location, provide a wonderful focal point and restful place to sit. During the COVID-19 pandemic it has been such a joy to see so many people, including the elderly and people with disabilities using the All Peoples' Trail."





#### **MEMBERS SINCE 1990**

"We love that we can walk over to the Nature Center from our house and the new entrances make accessing it even easier."









"The Nature Center has been so helpful in making me feel included. The improvements to the All People's Trail were well thought out, planned and designed so no one would be excluded. This has meant everything to us. It's very nice for people of all disabilities and abilities, alike."







"I love how the new ADAaccessible trail enhancements include larger gathering spaces for my classes to spend more time in discussion and observation. From the treehouse to the gazebo, the new improvements provide ample opportunity for us to learn together outside."



An invaluable for decades to come.

#### Nature Center Staff

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Christopher Hall, Director of Finance and Administration

Michelle Hall, Accountant/Bookkeeper

Katrina Heinzen. Seasonal Environmental Educator + B'earthday Party Educator

Nicole Hindman, Environmental Educator

Marcia McNallie, Events & Community Engagement Manager

Nick Mikash, Natural Resources Manager

Julia Mitchell, Grants Manager

Jeanette Moore, Volunteer Manager

Emily Penn, Natural Resources Technician

Erica Prange, Director of Education

Meri Ruble, Seasonal Environmental Educator

Greg Sabin, Visitor Services Associate + Interim Facilities Assitant

Lauren Schmidt, Outdoor Adventure Camp Manager Robert Sikora, Chief Development Officer

Rosalind Soltow, Membership & Development

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\*AS OF NOVEMBER 18, 2021

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#### REVENUE: CONTRIBUTED

- INDIVIDUALS \$244,892
- CORPORATIONS/FOUNDATIONS \$463,103
- GOVERNMENT \$115,311
- EVENTS (NET of COG - Plant Sale/Art on View) \$280,194
- ENDOWMENT (Distribution) \$105,516

#### **REVENUE: EARNED**

- PROGRAM FEES \$149,495
- FACILITY RENTALS/MERCHANDISE (NET) \$22,939

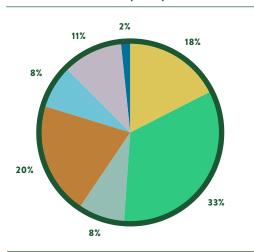
TOTAL REVENUE: \$1,381,450

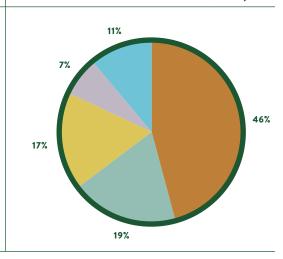
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- EDUCATION AND OUTREACH \$553,745
- FACILITIES & LAND MANAGEMENT \$228,721
- FUNDRAISING \$204,645
- MARKETING \$84,266
- MANAGEMENT & GENERAL \$132,417

\$1,203,794 **TOTAL EXPENSES:** 

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We apologize for any omissions. If your name has been omitted or listed incorrectly, please contact Rosalind Soltow at 216.321.5935 ext. 246 or soltow@shakerlakes.org.







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