



# Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center

## IMPACT REPORT 2022



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**OUR MISSION IS TO INSPIRE AN  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURAL WORLD  
AND OURSELVES AS PART OF IT—  
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.**

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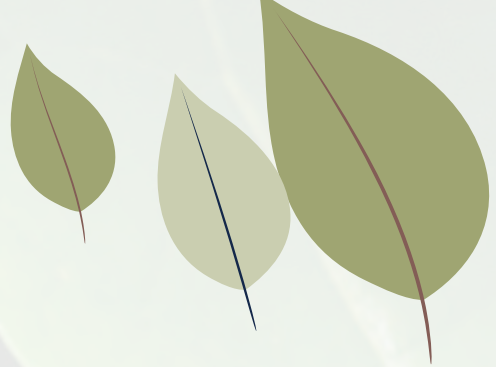
## EDUCATION STAFF

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Antonio DeCosta	Tori Gimple	Marianne Goddard
Meadow Kohrs-Monroe	Emily Macklin	Nicole Neigel
Abby O'Brien	Betty Pacelle	Sophie Stoll
Erin Toole	Connor Williams	

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Al Brown	Publications & IT Associate
Sanny Chacanaca	Visitor Services
Sydney Donovan	Finance Associate
Lori Edwards	Animal Curator
Chelle Farrand	Development & Design Associate
Craig Floyd	Coogan Farm Manager
Koralee Lawrence	Giving Garden Manager
Sandra Lewis	Visitor Services
Joe Sanda	Maintenance Manager
Una Schaffer	Visitor Services
Mayada Wadsworth	Database Manager





## CONNECTING WITH NATURE

With this impact report, we reflect on 2022– a transitional year of moving past the pandemic and winding down the Strategic Framework that has consistently guided our direction over the past three years. In 2020, we set the priorities of “protect, recover, reimagine” and this triad became a mantra for us to follow. Does it *protect* the organization? Does it help us *recover*? And does it *reimagine* what we do to help us become more inclusive and sustainable in the future?

Our best and most important work is also often our most challenging work. Resisting the urge to veer from our mission in difficult times is vital to the integrity of our promise to the community.

In 2022, we continued to help advance food equity in New London County by growing more produce in one year than ever before. The joint goal of increasing access to healthy, affordable food for those in need, while educating hundreds of people in regenerative gardening practices has allowed us to donate more than 100,000 pounds of food since the inception of the Giving Garden.

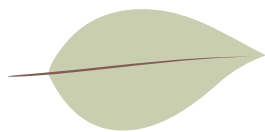
Further challenge came with the outbreak of Avian Influenza in Connecticut, posing a significant threat to our resident birds of prey. But DPNC is not alone in its work to rescue and rehabilitate wildlife and we acted collaboratively within a network of dedicated rehabilitators and rescue organizations to provide compassionate care to every animal possible, while also protecting our resident animals from the disease.

Also in 2022, our educational programs and events continued to rebound and even surpass pre-pandemic levels. Luminaria expanded into a three-night event, featuring more than 750 lit candles lining our forest trails, holiday libations at our fireside Winter Café, and the return of our beloved Woodland Santa. We also revived the Wild Mushroom Festival after a pandemic-related hiatus, featuring more than 40 local restaurants and unique craft vendors that dazzled guests.

A recent publication from the Children & Nature Network noted that nature is uniquely suited to support and welcome neurodivergency– an inclusive concept that Harvard Medical School describes as the idea that people learn, experience, and interact with the world around them in many different ways. Our programs have long reflected the variety of ways we strive to connect people with nature. But we continue to cultivate how we can support our community and be even more inclusive. For this reason, we are launching the DPNC Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Survey. This survey will provide us with a better understanding of the needs of our constituents, so that we can continue to facilitate access to nature for all. We invite all people involved with DPNC to participate in this survey at the following link: [www.dpnc.org/survey](http://www.dpnc.org/survey)

Davnet Conway  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Karen Stone  
**BOARD PRESIDENT**





## BRANCHING OUT WITH EDUCATION

Teaching environmental education to children is a joyous, challenging, rewarding and often unpredictable endeavor. However, environmental education doesn't only happen on our grounds in the Mystic area. We engage with thousands of students from preschool to high school, through in-school and after-school enrichment programs throughout the region.

Nothing sparks the interest of students (and teachers!) more than introducing live animals into the classroom as we present scientific and environmental subjects.

Bringing nature to where students are is essential. From helping students overcome a fear of snakes to watching a child's face as they feel how soft Rosie's (our resident King Pigeon) feathers are, we create indelible experiences with nature.



*Bottom image courtesy of Norwich Free Academy.*

DPNC educators teach Next Generation Science Standards aligned programs on a variety of natural history topics, from Connecticut owls and amphibian life cycles to the Thames River watershed and geology. Keeping a local focus in our education programs helps students understand the relevance of science in their everyday lives.

We'd like to see all schools in our area, regardless of budget levels, benefit from our natural history programs. In 2022, DPNC educators taught more than 550 off-site classes, with more than 50% of them funded through grants. The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund, Stonington Garden Club, Mystic Garden Club, Pfizer, Nordson Corporation and the New London Water Authority have all supported our in-school and after-school programs in 2022.

From Griswold to Westerly, Salem to New London, DPNC educators visited classrooms throughout the region. We spent school days with preschoolers at Head Start programs, sixth graders at ISAAC in New London, second graders in Norwich, kindergartners at the Friendship School in Waterford, third graders in Stonington, and many more.

In many districts, DPNC is an integral part of school science curricula and enrichment programs. Ensuring funding each year for these programs is crucial for continuity. One example of this is our program Organisms of Connecticut, funded by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut's Norwich Youth Grants. For more than a decade, second grade students in Norwich Public Schools have studied plants, animals and habitats of southeastern Connecticut through a series of in-school programs and field trips to our campus. The DPNC team is proud to have had a positive impact on the education of many young students.



## A BIRDS-EYE VIEW OF ANIMAL CARE

When most people think of the impacts of the current strain of avian influenza, they may think of the increase in egg prices. However, the impact of the avian flu on the Nature Center is much farther reaching.

Due to the highly contagious nature of this disease, animal care staff and volunteers have been exceedingly cautious in facilitating a safe environment

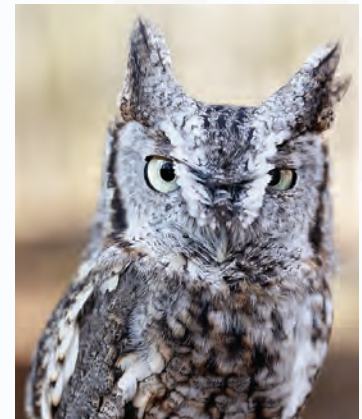
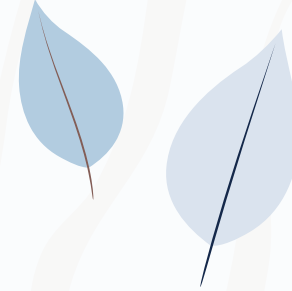
for our resident birds, adjusting their usual routine. According to our Animal Curator Lori Edwards, “We’ve never had so many resident birds of prey as we do now. They are not releasable and are important ambassadors in our education programs, so protecting them is a priority.”

In a case of great timing, one of our volunteers chose to



use her volunteer work in animal care as the basis of her thesis for a master's degree in Wildlife Conservation and Management. Working with our Animal Curator, she created a biosecurity plan for DPNC. Biological security refers to the measures taken to prevent the introduction or spread of disease.

The comprehensive plan details preventive measures for best practices of daily actions that are still in use in and around DPNC bird enclosures. For example, access to the enclosures is limited, and all footwear is sanitized or covered before entering to feed or clean in these areas. Any animals coming in for potential rehabilitation are closely evaluated and quarantined. Other animals, such as squirrels or chipmunks, which could be carrying the disease are redirected to rehabilitation facilities that do not have resident birds of prey. With this plan, we have kept our animals disease free and healthy throughout the year.





# GROWING BEYOND EXPECTATION

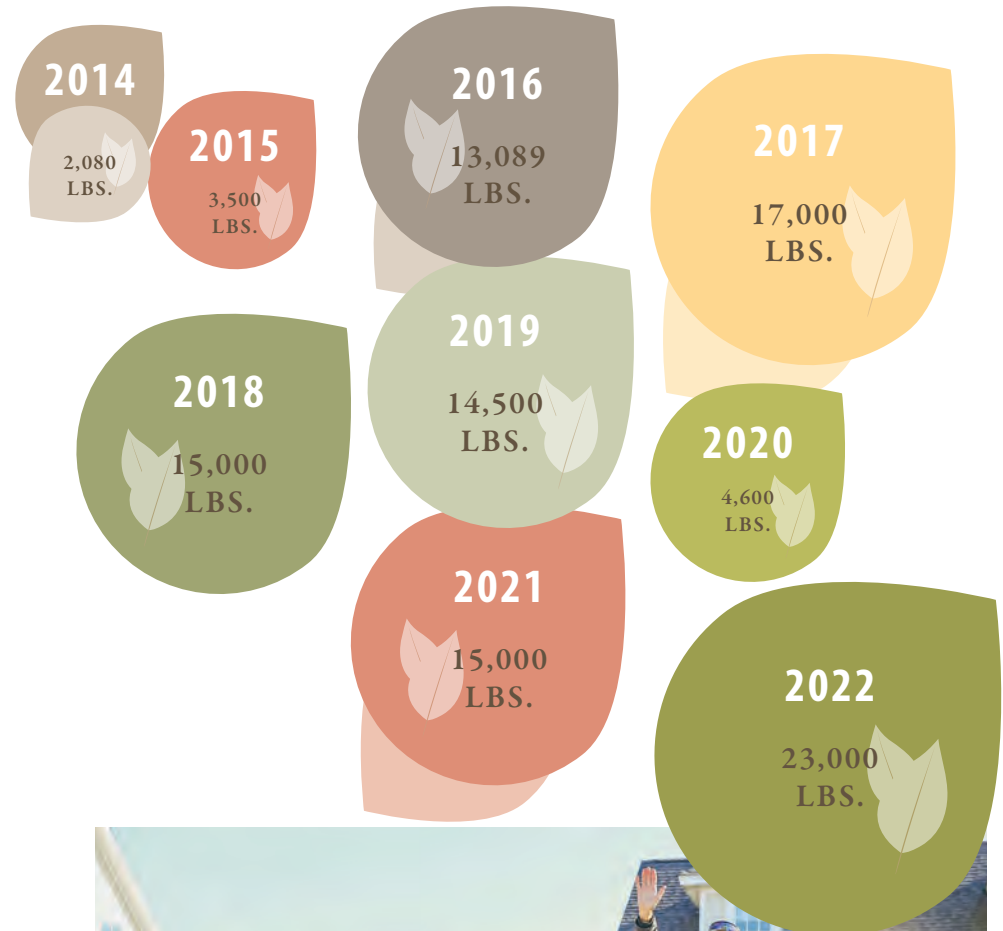
The United Way ALICE report noted that as of 2021, 41% of households with children in Connecticut live paycheck to paycheck and experience food insecurity. Why is this of concern to the Nature Center? Because, we truly believe it is possible to nurture humans and the earth at the same time.

DPNC's Farmer Craig took this credo one step further. He believed that our Giving Garden was capable of producing 20,000 pounds of food in a single growing season using regenerative gardening techniques. In February 2022 Farmer Craig announced his upcoming retirement from full-time garden manager and thus we felt it was the perfect year to set the ambitious goal of growing 20,022 pounds of produce for the food insecure.

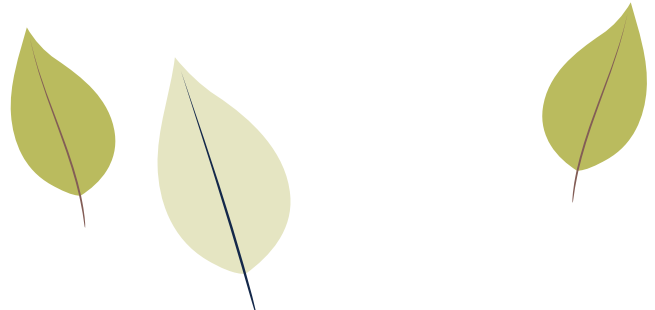
Perhaps there were a few particularly heavy Eastham turnips grown as insurance, but a healthy garden and dedicated volunteers combined efforts and made for a record harvest. The results were undeniable— more than 23,000 pounds of produce delivered to the Gemma E. Moran Food Center in New London, CT.

Having met this incredible goal, Farmer Craig has shifted to a part-time capacity teaching regenerative gardening programs, while serving as a mentor to our new Giving Garden Manager, Koralee Lawrence.

Koralee has learned the ins and outs of what makes our garden grow and has also earned the faith of our dedicated volunteers. We are lucky to have such a seamless transition in the garden and don't mind saying we have donated over 100,000 pounds of produce to help feed those in need in our community.







## THE IMPACT OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

**375** VOLUNTEERS AT THE NATURE CENTER

**6,026** HOURS DONATED IN VOLUNTEER SERVICE

**\$180,780** IN VALUE OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES GIVEN



**ANIMAL CARE:** A devoted team of 16 animal care volunteers fed, cleaned and enriched both injured rehabilitating wildlife and resident animal ambassadors, totaling more than 45 volunteer hours each month. With the widespread impact of the avian influenza, Animal Care implemented a biosecurity plan to protect resident animals. Elisha Midyette, an animal care volunteer, wrote the plan as the capstone project for her Unity College master's degree.

**EDUCATION:** Summer camp enrollment was at a fever pitch as many new families discovered us, and dozens of returning campers were welcomed back. With so many of our camps at capacity, the Nature Center also celebrated the return of our teen volunteers! Ten young adults volunteered with us for a total of 537 hours, providing extra energy, care and assistance to our youngest camp groups.

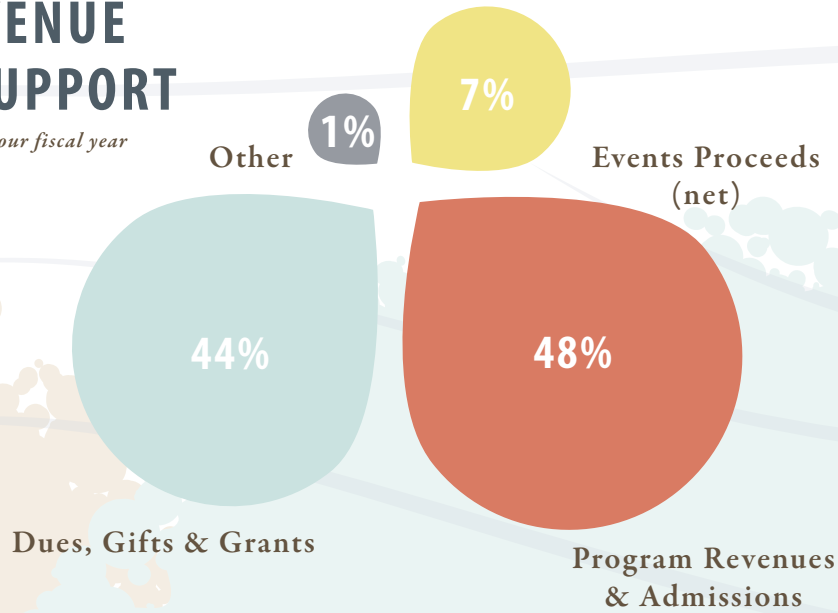
**EVENTS:** Beginning with Woodland Egg Hunt, events were back and really running strong. Our 162 event volunteers donated 640 hours of time to DPNC. Our committed volunteers are an essential ingredient for success—expanding the reach of our staff, while at the same time supporting a vital revenue source and ensuring our ability to further our mission.

**GIVING GARDEN:** With an impressive 1,746 hours given by volunteers in the garden, DPNC donated a goal-shattering 23,000 pounds of nutrient-rich produce to the food insecure of New London County. Led by volunteer Sherrill Janeiro, the herb garden flourished, with volunteers producing a record 800 pounds of herbs. Work parties, corporate groups and dedicated regulars kept the Giving Garden's success on an upward trajectory.

**HABITAT RESTORATION:** This ten-member team, led by Wild Ones' Lydia Pan, logged 383 hours focused on the improvement of wildlife habitat and biodiversity at Coogan Farm. By replacing invasive plants with native species, volunteers created demonstration gardens for wildlife and visitors. Their task list included adding purple love grass to the Teaching Meadow, managing Japanese knotweed, cleanup at the preschool, and removing autumn olive and multiflora rose.

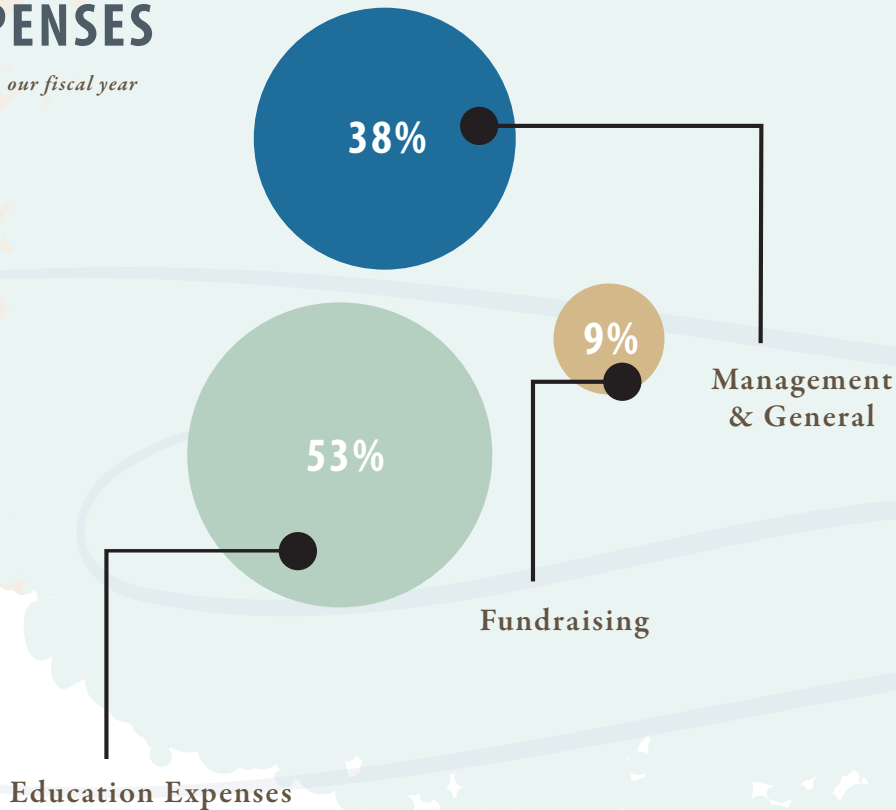
# REVENUE & SUPPORT

*based on our fiscal year*



# EXPENSES

*based on our fiscal year*



# OUR FUTURE HEALTH & STRENGTH

2022 was a healthy financial year. We met our support goals with a solid foundation of financial support from donors and our Green-Tie event. Our reliance on rescue grant funding was reduced, as earned revenue from educational programs continued to rebound. Robust earning from Summer Camp, public, and outreach programs helped us exceed our goals, ending the year almost \$100,000 ahead of projected revenues and eliminating the anticipated deficit.

The bulk of expense increases were in staffing and staff compensation to account for rising costs, inflation, and competition in the job market. Investing in our staff has been a priority to ensure that we continue to create an equitable work environment, attract and retain high caliber employees, and fill key positions.

The budget for 2023 is set at 1.3 million, our highest since 2018, after being held flat or reduced for four years to ensure we survived the pandemic. This higher budget reflects a turn out of survival mode and into investment and growth for our future.







## VOLUNTEERING IS A PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF HEART

Grass whip? Check. Clippers? Check. Trash bag? Check and ready to go.



DPNC Volunteer Dr. Jay Fortner has his toolkit ready for a trail maintenance session at the Peace Sanctuary, a 30-acre property in Mystic stewarded by the Nature Center. “My goal is keeping trails open and accessible,” he laughs, “not necessarily groomed and beautiful!” Fortner has been volunteering on the trails at the Peace Sanctuary since 2019, but that’s just one of his volunteer tasks for the Nature Center. A retired veterinarian, he also takes a volunteer shift caring for resident birds of prey each week.

Jay and his wife, Cynthia, relocated from California in the 1980s, and thought they’d only be on the East Coast for a few years. Four children and 36 years later, they are happy to still be here in Mystic. After a 33-year career at Pfizer, Jay was looking for ways to contribute locally. His appreciation for the outdoors and interest in trees naturally led him to the Nature Center and he began his volunteer journey with the orchard restoration project at Coogan Farm.

Later, Jay expanded his volunteer role and trained in the care of turtles and amphibians before focusing his volunteer work with outdoor birds in animal care

as well as on trail maintenance at the Peace Sanctuary, near his Mystic home. A big bonus in volunteering: he sometimes will overlap with his daughter Madison, also an animal care volunteer.

Throughout the organization, Jay is known for his passionate approach to his volunteer role and sometimes offering veterinary expertise when requested. Birds of prey and wildlife rehabilitation form a new chapter of learning for Jay and he speaks with gratitude about this opportunity. “Birds are new to me, but I’m always learning from Lori and the other staff, who are so knowledgeable.”

“I enjoy connecting with the birds and being in the enclosures. It’s a privilege to work and care for them,” he explains. At home, Jay is an avid gardener (along with wife Cynthia, a master gardener) with an interest in increasing pollinators and growing native species or plants he has learned about in his work as a volunteer. “DPNC is a wonderful place to volunteer and learn, and I enjoy using my skills to help others.”



# EVENTS ROOTED IN NATURE

Nature Center events provide special opportunities to gather as a community in celebration of nature. They help introduce the joy of the natural world to the public alongside our longtime supporters, and they are particularly enjoyable to “kids at heart” (also known as adults) who have aged out of summer camp.

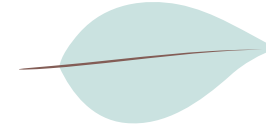
October saw the return of our signature event– the Wild Mushroom Festival held on National Mushroom Day. While we have always had a fondness for mushrooms, the public’s interest in foraging boomed during the pandemic thanks, in part, to social media influencers sharing their adventures on the trails. Our event in 2022 welcomed new and veteran attendees alike, with an array of food and beverage purveyors, increased educational programs, and a delightful new blooming of the Mushroom Marketplace featuring vendors of mushroom and woodland items. The result was a sold-out, fantastic fungi festival, where attendees enjoyed the spacious atmosphere and ample food samples afforded by the preselling of tickets. Fungi vendors and guests are already planning ahead for WMF 2023, on Saturday, October 14th.

Three weeks before the Wild Mushroom Festival, the buzz about the Green-Tie Celebration affirmed the success of our cocktail and light-fare format. With the theme “Friends of the Forest” portrayed in four seasonal vignettes, Green-Tie guests enjoyed socializing during our “back to our roots” evening highlighting our rescue and rehabilitation operations. The Fund-A-Need paddle raise broke all former records as did the chilly temperatures of the evening!

Another classic Nature Center event, Luminaria, ran for three nights with each night hosting a different featured guest: Animal Ambassadors, Woodland Santa,

and Holiday Carol Singers. The final night transformed into a magical, snowy scene as visitors lingered a little longer– some indulging in the Winter Café that offered spiked peppermint hot cocoa and hot cider with spiced rum around three roaring fires amid the snowfall.

Authentic experiences in nature are our forte– they bring the community closer together while providing support of our programs, garden, and wildlife rescue and rehabilitation efforts.





## OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Our partners provide major support for our programs and events. These large and small local businesses fund programs for the whole family, so that the Nature Center can offer them at little or no cost. We gratefully offer recognition of this crucial support through our annual directory and social media. You can view and download the PDF version of the directory at <https://dpnc.org/community-partners> When you are able to visit them, please thank them for supporting the Nature Center. If you would like more information on how to become a partner, please contact Vera Harsh at 860-536-1216, ext. 111.

ACE OVERHEAD DOORS LLC | AQUARION WATER COMPANY OF CONNECTICUT  
ASA ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCTS, INC | BARLEY HEAD BREWERY  
BEER'D BREWING CO. | BLEU SQUID | BIG Y WORLD CLASS MARKET  
CAPIZZANO OLIVE OILS & VINEGARS | CAPTAIN DANIEL PACKER INNE  
DRAGONFLY EQUESTRIAN CENTER | FAIRVIEW | FLEMING'S FEED  
FOXWOODS RESORT CASINO | GARVEY, STEELE & BANCROFT, LLP  
GOWRIE GROUP | HANG THE MOON | KARMA KITCHEN | KELLEY'S PACE  
MYSTIC CYCLE CENTRE | MYSTIC DRAWBRIDGE ICE CREAM  
MYSTIC HARBOR GROUP | MYSTIC RIVER MARINA | MYSTIC SHIPYARD, LLC  
OLO HAIR STUDIO | SEACOAST MUSHROOMS | SEA VIEW SNACK BAR  
STONERIDGE JV LLC | STONINGTON VETERINARY HOSPITAL  
TIDAL RIVER CLOTHING COMPANY | TROVE MENS PROVISIONS  
VALENTI FAMILY OF DEALERSHIPS | WALLER, SMITH & PALMER  
WOODFELLAS WOOD FIRED PIZZA & WINGS | ZEST FRESH BAKERY

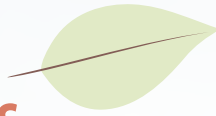


# DENISON PEQUOTSEPOS NATURE CENTER

COMMUNITY PARTNERS DIRECTORY 2022 | 2023



# THE POSITIVE POWER OF GRANTS



Transformational. That is the impact of a three year, \$250,000 multidisciplinary grant from the Edward and Mary Lord Foundation that concluded in 2022. Designed to enhance awareness and knowledge of nature and heritage at their nexus at the Coogan Farm campus, the grant impact reached throughout the Farm and beyond.

Year One of the Lord Foundation grant resulted in the reclamation of apple and pear trees in the Gallup Orchard. As we cleared invasive growth from in and around over 200 trees, we implemented a plan to preserve the habitat important to migrating birds and other species such as the Eastern Cottontail. Testing of the fruit trees revealed three varieties with known origins to some of the earliest apples found in the United States. These included “Unknown Founder 13” (a parent of many russet cultivars), “Rienette Franche,” the well-known “Macintosh,” and an abundance of unique pears of Asian and European descent.

Also in year one of the grant, the Avery Farmhouse Welcome Center was redesigned into a critical educational space for our education programs, including Neighbors & Nature, which provides flexible and affordable extended-day child care and enrichment for working families.

In the second year of the grant, the majority of the stabilization and reconstruction of the Stillman Mansion foundation was completed. Trees and other growth were removed from inside the foundation, and masons uncovered and restored original features of the foundation, such as a coal chute and stairs down to the ground level. Orchard pruning also continued and resulted in an autumn pear harvest for perry– a sparkling beverage similar to cider, but made with pears.

A major focus of the grant’s third year was the completion of the Greenmanville Trail self-guided walking tour. A physical and virtual progression of six stations between Coogan Farm and Mystic Seaport Museum comprise the Greenmanville Trail and tell the stories of land and people over four centuries. The tour will be officially unveiled in the spring of 2023 with additional signage planned at the site of the Mystic River Boathouse Park once completed.

Perhaps most importantly, this valuable grant funding inspired us to research and reflect on the implications of Colonialism, social justice issues, and the maritime and agricultural use of the land we steward. We feel it compels us to care for and preserve the land for the common good, wildlife, and future generations acknowledging this as a place to heal wounds, hearts and earth.







## 2022 GRANTORS

AHEPA New London Foundation Inc. | Ashaway Charitable Trust  
Bodenwein Foundation | Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut  
Connecticut Humanities | Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation  
Eastern Connecticut Community Garden Association  
The General William Mayer Foundation  
Gildersleeve White Fund | Kitchings Family Foundation  
Mystic Garden Club | Mystic Lions Club  
Nordson Corporation Foundation | Panoram Foundation Inc  
Pfizer Inc. | Robert G. Youngs Family Foundation  
Rotary Club of Mystic | Rotary Foundation of the Stoningtons Inc  
State of Connecticut | Stonington Garden Club | Thames River Garden Club  
The Edward and Mary Lord Foundation | The General William Mayer Foundation  
The Scripps Family Fund for Education and the Arts  
Town of Stonington | Veolia Water N. A. - Northeast, LLC

## 2022 MATCHING GIFT COMPANIES

Bank of America | Biogen MA Inc | Charter Oak Federal Credit Union  
Chelsea Groton Foundation | Pfizer Foundation | Project Worldwide  
Raytheon Technologies | Reliant Medical Group  
Roche Molecular Systems | Ventana Medical Systems, Inc.

## REMEMBRANCE AND TRIBUTE

### IN HONOR OF

Elizabeth Paffard Anderson  
Betsy Sherman Brewster  
Susan Charette  
Rob and Tory Christian  
DPNC animals  
DPNC staff  
Lori Edwards  
Amie Floyd  
Farmer Craig Floyd  
Sandy Fromson  
Pauline Gaucher  
Constance Denison Pemberton Glore  
The Guyot family  
Peter Holland  
Marie Holman  
Doris “The Eagle Lady” Mager



### IN MEMORY OF

John E. Avery Jr, Backyard Wild Bunny Family,  
George Belke, Louise Brown, Nicholas Caruso  
Court Chapman, ET the Owl, Kali Finegan  
Thomas Lee Gallup and Beverly Altimari Gallup  
Dottie Hadsell, Sally Halsey, Ed Hart, Marion Ludington Hughes  
Helga Kerttula, Eric B. Kronholm, Gretchen Schur Leming, David B. Lyman  
Abigail McGuirk, Mary Motherway, Dennis O’Brien, Lois W. Poinier  
Louise Quarto, Darwin and Millie Reed, Elizabeth Reed, Rodney Root  
Dick Schmitz, Jules Xavier Schneider, Connor Sutphen– Emma’s horse  
John R. Upholz, Betty White

# NOTABLE NATURE CENTER NUMBERS



**22,950** large mice consumed by birds of prey and reptiles in our care.



**52,800** feet of hiking trails explored through our network of preserved land.



**23,000** pounds of produce donated to help feed the food insecure of New London County.



**752** luminarias lit each night for our annual Luminaria walks before the busy holiday rush.

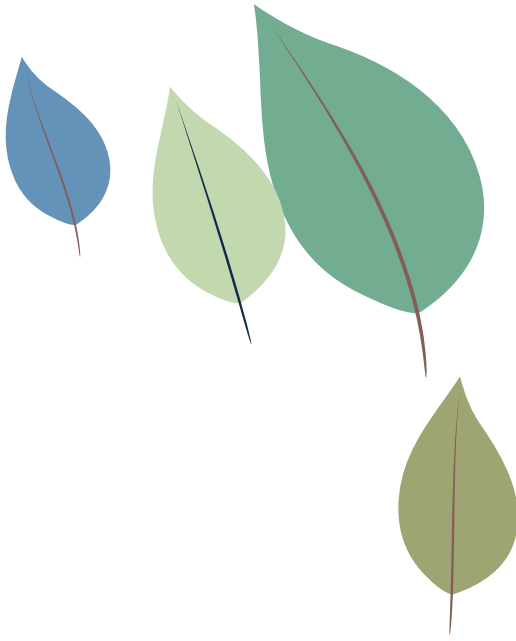


**306** scoops of delicious candy-cap ice cream were served at Wild Mushroom Festival this year.



**148** pieces of origami folded for the Green-Tie Celebration, which raised over \$80,000.





## **TWO LOCATIONS, ONE GREAT PLACE**

**Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center  
Main Campus**

**109 Pequotsepos Road, Mystic, CT**  
*Exhibits, Live Animals, Trails,  
Classrooms and Preschool*

**Coogan Farm Nature & Heritage Center**

**162 Greenmanville Avenue, Mystic, CT**  
*Trails, Classrooms, Giving Garden  
and Neighbors & Nature*

**Denison Pequotsepos  
Nature Center**

**[www.dpnc.org](http://www.dpnc.org) 860-536-1216**