



Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Growing A Future Legacy	4
A Review of Our Financial Health	6
Farming On in the Giving Garden	8
An Environmental Hero	9
Collaborative Programs Make A Difference	10
Watching Out For the Turtles	11
Transformation You Can See	12
Habitat Restoration & A Warm Welcome	13
Volunteers Make Magic Happen	14
Remembrance and Tribute	15

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

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Claudia Bachman-Bouchard
Trad Dart
Eileen Duggan
Fatima Matos
Stacey Smith
Richard Steele

Dorrit Castle
Jane Dawson
Jennifer Herbst
Rebecca Nolan
Steve Solley
Karen Stone

Stanton Ching
Steven Dodd
Robert Martin
Cynthia Peabody
Rowland Stebbins
Fred Ziegler

DIRECTORS

Davnet Conway
Kevin Metivier
Vera Harsh
Kim Hargrave
Suzanne Burns
Jess Morris
Scott Parry
Anna Sawin
Tessa Stuart

Executive Director
Finance Director
Development Director
Education Director
Preschool Director
Summer Camp Director
Facilities & Grounds Director
Marketing & Communications Director
After School Program Director

EDUCATION STAFF

Mary Audette
Michael Farley
Meadow Kohrs-Monroe
Abby O'Brien
Sophie Stoll

Tammy Bonanno
Tori Gimple
Emily Macklin
Betty Pacelle
Erin Toole
Antonio DeCosta
Marianne Goddard
Nicole Neigel
Julia Pratt
Connor Williams

STAFF

Al Brown
Sanny Chacanaca
Sydney Donovan
Lori Edwards
Chelle Farrand
Craig Floyd
Koralee Lawrence
Sandra Lewis
Joe Sanda
Una Schaffer
Mayada Wadsworth

Publications & IT Associate
Visitor Services
Finance Associate
Animal Curator
Development & Design Associate
Coogan Farm Manager
Giving Garden Manager
Visitor Services
Maintenance Manager
Visitor Services
Database Manager

GROWING A FUTURE LEGACY

We are pleased to share the progress the Nature Center has made working consistently and boldly to advance our mission and strengthen the organization in 2023. Acknowledging our past goes hand in hand with strengthening the protections for the land we steward for the future.

We kicked off the spring by naming the Giving Garden in honor of retiring farmer Craig Floyd. Craig came to DPNC with a vision: to heal the earth while healing humans— physically through food, mentally through peaceful interactions with the soil, and spiritually through compassionate work. The creation of a new endowment dedicated to the operational costs of the garden serves as the “seed money” to cover the annual cost of seeds and ensures that this work will continue. Generous support from donors, and longtime partners the United Way and the Robert G Youngs Family Foundation, helped us surpass our original goal with the endowment standing at over \$80,000.

In May, we launched a virtual tour and new signage for the Greenmanville Trail as the culmination of our three-year Lord Foundation Grant. The self-guided walking tour explores how Lifeways (people), Foodways (food), and Greenways (nature) intersect at Coogan Farm and tell the stories of land and people.

Through a multi-year grant from the State Historic Preservation Office, DPNC nominated the Gungywamp property to the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places and ensured its naming as a State Archaeological Preserve. This action positioned DPNC to partner with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on policies to better protect the property, while providing increased access to the site through hundreds of hikes DPNC leads on the property every year.

Late in 2023, DPNC was notified that we would be the recipient of a \$150,000 bequest from the trust of Ann G. Ryon. Ann was a longtime resident of the town of Stonington, who had an affinity for animals and was attracted to DPNC’s mission of caring for wildlife through our rescue and rehabilitation program. We are honored to be one of five nonprofits chosen to receive a bequest. The gift was realized early in 2024 and will be reflected in the annual report next year.

As our financial position shows, DPNC continues to increase its assets through sound fiscal planning— a responsibility not taken lightly by our Board of Trustees. After over 50 years, the Board engaged legal council to bring our Certificate of Incorporation up to date and into compliance with the current IRS required 501(c)(3) restriction language for charitable organizations. The changes were approved by the membership at the annual meeting in October of 2023. These updated regulations serve to ensure the land we own is preserved in perpetuity, to strengthen the stewardship of gifts the Nature Center receives, and to strongly uphold the intent of each donor’s gift as part of its legacy.

Indeed, DPNC’s strength is built on an ongoing legacy of people who care deeply for the environment and help us deliver our mission. The creation of the “Maggie Jones Environmental Hero Award” will allow us to continue to recognize those who exemplify and advance the DPNC mission in the future.



Davnet Conway

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Karen Stone

BOARD PRESIDENT

A REVIEW OF OUR FINANCIAL HEALTH

Our financial health continues to be driven by donor support and program revenue. Appeal donations, major gifts, and bequests strengthened our overall position in 2023, with support income exceeding expectations at \$774,085. This resulted in a significant increase in our endowed funds which now stand at over half a million dollars, double that of just five years ago. Earned income was also strong at \$677,413 an increase of over 12% from FY 2022. Expenses finished at \$1,355,903, increasing 8% over FY 2022 primarily due to rising costs.

Demand and need for our programs and services remains high. Our priority is to make our programs accessible to all at affordable rates with hundreds of



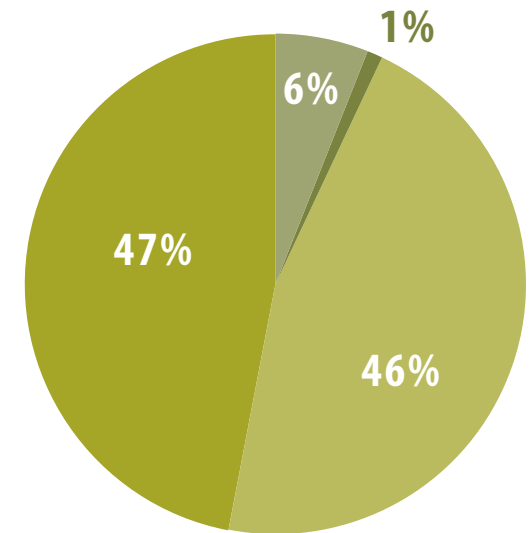
free and subsidized programs offered throughout the year. Every month we offer daytime and full moon hikes free of charge to both members and non-members alike. Other programs receive strong support from grantors and foundations. Our *Dig into Nature* program was supported by the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation, Nature Creation Station by the E.K. Bunting Fund, and ongoing camp scholarships have been supported by the Scripps Family Foundation for Education and the Arts.

Donations and earned income also directly support our wildlife rescue and rehabilitation program, and operations in the Craig Floyd Giving Garden. While rising expenses are unavoidable, DPNC prides itself on handling gifts with integrity, prioritizing donations and support towards maximizing the impact of our mission-based initiatives.

REVENUE & SUPPORT

based on our fiscal year

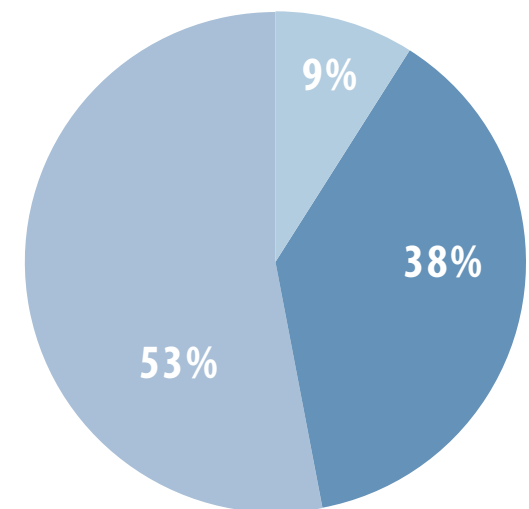
PROGRAM REVENUES & ADMISSIONS	
677,413	46%
DUES, GIFTS & GRANTS	
689,084	47%
EVENT PROCEEDS (NET)	
85,001	6%
OTHER	
16,655	1%
TOTAL	1,468,153



EXPENSES

based on our fiscal year

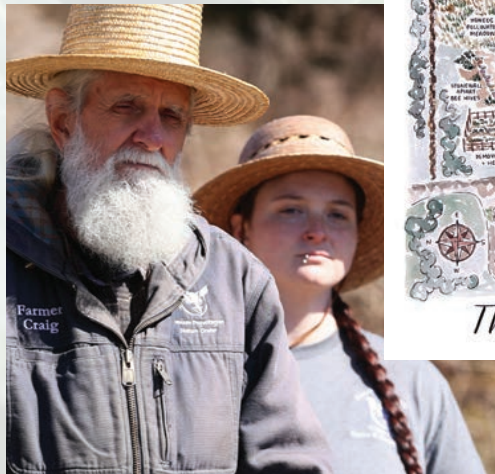
MANAGEMENT & GENERAL	
514,782	38%
EDUCATION	
718,564	53%
FUNDRAISING	
122,557	9%
TOTAL	1,355,903



THE TRADITION OF "FARM ON" IN THE GIVING GARDEN

In a moving day of celebration, dozens of friends, volunteers, and dignitaries gathered at Coogan Farm to dedicate the Giving Garden in honor of Farmer Craig Floyd. He had planned his retirement for a year and had mentored Koralee Lawrence for several years to succeed him ensuring a smooth transition at the beginning of the growing year. As a result, Farmer Koralee, a dedicated corps of volunteers, and several corporate and organizational groups of volunteers combined efforts to harvest a stellar season of produce to benefit the food insecure in southeastern Connecticut.

Also during the dedication ceremony of the Craig Floyd Giving Garden, a new endowment fund was announced to ensure annual "seed money" for the garden. The garden donates vegetables, fruit, and herbs to the United Way for distribution through the Gemma Moran Food Center and several of their mobile food pantries.



AN ENVIRONMENTAL HERO

The 2023 Green-Tie Celebration was a very special event on several levels. Marking 10 years since the acquisition of Coogan Farm, the event was held at Coogan Farm for the first time. Photo displays and antique drawings as décor chronicled the farm throughout its history and renovations. Casual "farm chic" attire encouraged gathering around the fire pits into the night.

The inaugural *Maggie Jones Environmental Hero Award* was appropriately presented to Maggie Jones for her decades of service to the Nature Center. It was Maggie's vision to preserve the property and advance the greenway to connect the main Nature Center campus to the Mystic River, protecting two valuable watersheds.

In a surprise announcement, it was revealed that a magnanimous gift from Karen Stone and David Schulz retired the final part of the farm's bridge financing ahead of schedule. Their gift of over \$100,000 officially concluded the *Campaign to Save Coogan Farm* and permanently preserved the 45-acre gem in the middle of Mystic.



COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Learning and listening to the rhythms of the outdoors can inspire creativity, curiosity and develop a connection with nature. Research studies have shown that being connected to the natural world can build confidence and lower stress for children and adults alike.

The Nature Center cultivates these connections through programming at public libraries across CT and RI expanding our reach to a diverse audience. Last year, there were 105 library programs delivered ranging from summer reading themes for youth to lectures on backyard predators for adults.

Another effective and artfully collaborative program that is making a significant impact is *Arts in Nature* held monthly at the JX Barn with the Montville Transitional Academy. This grant-funded program serves students with intellectual and other disabilities from ages 18 through 21 years. The goal is for participants to become more comfortable in the community and connected to nature during the exploratory art sessions.



WATCHING OUT FOR THE TURTLES

In addition to our many resident birds of prey, the Nature Center also has seven different terrestrial and aquatic species of native turtles in our care. Seven Eastern Painted turtles, four Eastern Box turtles, two Spotted turtles, two Northern Diamondback Terrapins, one Common Musk turtle, one Common Snapping turtle and one not-so-common Wood turtle named Newt. Each species has its own unique set of care and rehabilitation requirements, from weekly baths and weighing to customized enclosures and diets.

This diverse population within our Animal Care department allows us to discuss adaptations and educate the public on the differences between these wild and charismatic creatures. Newt, for example, depends on multiple habitats such as streams and forests for survival, so she is more vulnerable to habitat loss. Newt is also listed as a “species of special concern” and we do think she is quite a special turtle!



TRANSFORMATION YOU CAN SEE

A generous grant from the General William Mayer Foundation funded a major project in the Giving Garden area at Coogan Farm. Originally awarded in 2021, the series of projects that concluded in 2023 transformed an area that had become overgrown with invasives. A major portion of the effort included eradicating mugwort in the section known as “the Serpentine Rock,” where plans called to use the majestic rocks as a backdrop for a small outdoor classroom in amphitheater style. Using a combination of solarization, rock burial and root system removal with an excavator, and manual removal of weeds, the area was prepared for the thick application of cardboard and deep wood chip mulch. The placement of granite benches (preserved from the Coogan Farm project) and the planting of some native specimens completed this important restoration on one of the most heavily walked trails at Coogan Farm.



HABITAT RESTORATION: A HABIT WORTH PURSUING

It’s no secret that collaboration can often yield higher results than individual efforts. With that in mind, the Mountain Laurel Chapter of the Wild Ones, led by volunteers Lydia Pan and Mark Kronenberg, expanded their efforts to remove invasive plant species at Coogan Farm and replace them with native varieties. Complementing funding from the General William Mayer Foundation for the purchase of native plants, the hearty group known as the Habitat Restoration Team applied near weekly doses of elbow grease to the newly cleared Serpentine Rock area. Lydia also devised a planting plan to visually connect the Craig Floyd Giving Garden with the Jeanne and Harvey DeMovick Pollinator and Herb Garden and donated many plants from her own garden.



A WARM WELCOME

Regular maintenance is overseen by the Nature Center’s new Director of Facilities and Grounds, Scott Parry. A longtime supporter of DPNC, Scott also served on the Board of Trustees before taking on his “retirement job.” He wears many hats as he tackles projects at—and between—both campuses.



VOLUNTEERS MAKE MAGIC HAPPEN

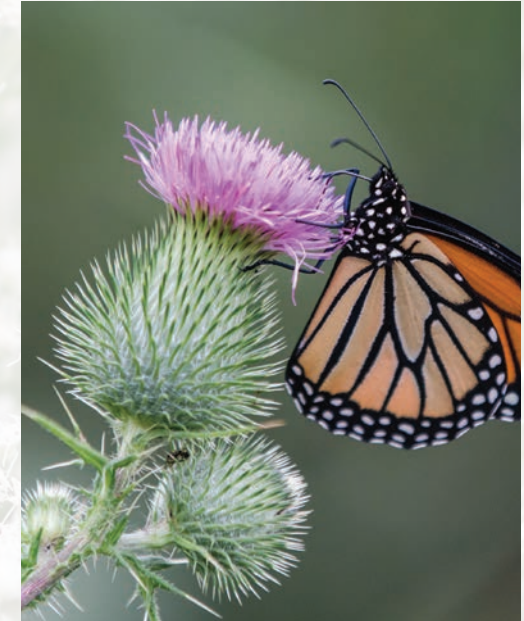
Volunteer engagement continues to increase with more than 500 volunteers donating their time, talent and spirit to make nature-centered magic happen at the Nature Center and Coogan Farm campuses. With approximately 5,000 hours from families, high school students, corporate teams and dedicated nature enthusiasts of all ages, volunteer tasks were as varied as the volunteers themselves. Those generous and valued hours were spent harvesting and trenching, cleaning and painting, trimming, sawing, serving food, sewing and decorating in the rain or shine. All of these efforts allowed more people and animals to be fed, children to frolic in nature and the community and visitors to celebrate nature together.



REMEMBRANCE AND TRIBUTE

IN HONOR OF

Dorrit Castle
Susan Charette
Davnet Conway
DPNC staff
Lori Edwards
Craig Floyd
Frank the red-tailed hawk
Constance Denison
Pemberton Glore
Maggie Jones
Ana Schneider
Rich Steele



IN MEMORY OF

Janet Chapman
Pamela Crandall
Kali Lynn Finegan
Sally Halsey
Helga Kerttula
Jessie and Gordon Leitner
David B. Lyman
Louise Quarto
Jules Xavier Schneider
Nancy Thompson
Christine Zeppieri

Patrick Conway
Victor Dufault
Andy Gildersleeve
Scottie & Marie Holman
Erik R. Laisi
Debra Lord-Sermon
Royal "Jim" Marshall, Jr
Darwin and Millie Reed
Albert Stone
Phillips Van Der Griend



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 860-536-1216