



Seasons



FRIENDS OF
Reinstein
WOODS

2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT

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In 2023, we welcomed a new wood turtle ambassador: Mr. Worldwide. Our naming contest for him raised over \$200!

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends,

While others may be referring to their eras, we here at the woods like to think of our journey in seasons. And what a season the 2022-2023 fiscal year has been! On the heels of announcing our impending building expansion for the Education Center in October 2022, we moved into our 20th anniversary year of Friends of Reinstein Woods.

This milestone offered a time to reflect, reassess and set new goals for ourselves. We challenged ourselves to raise \$20,000 in 2023, and because of our community of generous donors, supportive members and dedicated volunteers, WE DID IT!

This past year, we also began the foundational work of setting our sights on the future. Planning for the Education Center expansion is underway, and we're hopeful that shovels will be hitting the ground in the spring of 2025. Exhibit planning and campaign preparations to make new and interactive spaces within the Education Center are some of our top priorities for 2024. The board, staff and I are all hard at work to update our Strategic Plan and chart a course of action for Friends of Reinstein Woods over the next five years and beyond.

This past year, we were able to secure grant funding to enact on some of the recommendations from the 2021 Forest Management Plan. The Woodland Garden project, which you can read about on page 8, will secure a chunk of the preserve with deer-proof fencing. This will allow for forest regeneration, as well as create a living exhibit of the native plants and shrubs that provide such amazing biodiversity in the woods.

Our educational endeavors continue to thrive and grow as well. From the thousands of students that are engaged on school tours at the preserve, our summer day camps, and after-school and in-school programming, to new partnerships with the Climate Connections for Buffalo's East Side Youth program (see page 9).


With each season that we pass through, we continue to embrace the changes that come with it and look for the opportunities to continue helping our community share in nature's harmony. On behalf of the board of directors and staff at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, we want to thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our mission. We could not protect this beautiful space or inspire the next generation of scientists, naturalist and advocates without your donations, your volunteer hours and your support.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

With gratitude,

Eric Gallo





OUR MISSION

Friends of Reinstein Woods is to promote knowledge of nature through awareness, appreciation, and stewardship of the unique and diverse environment of Reinstein Woods and its programs.

2022-2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eric Gallo President	Amanda Lippes Secretary	Esther Clabeaux Jenn Lodi-Smith Rob Fetter	Daniel Haeusser Michael McClain John DiMao
Tim Robson Vice President	Andy Moon Treasurer	<i>In 2023-24, John DiMao is stepping down from the board and Sarah Grimaldi has joined our board.</i>	

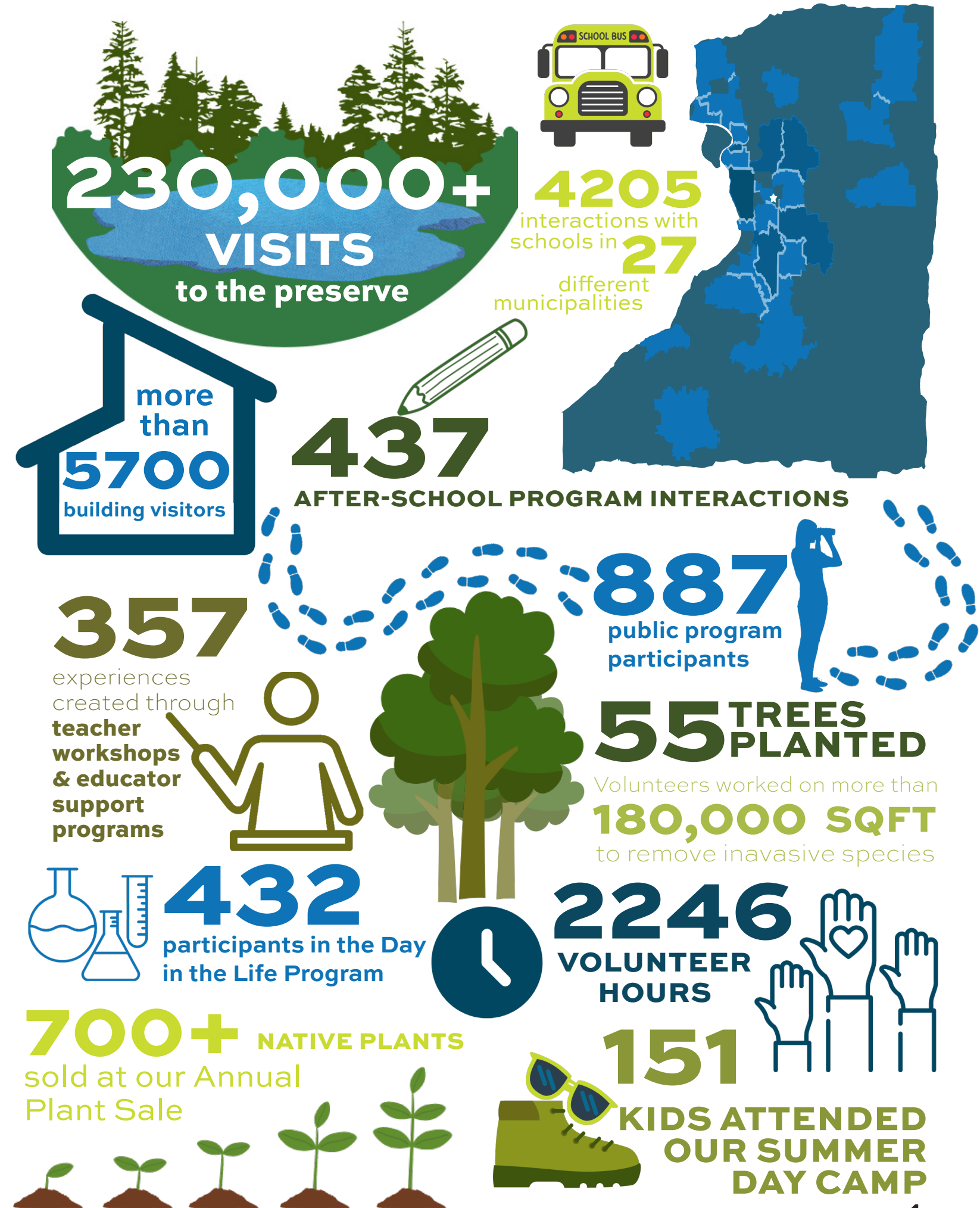
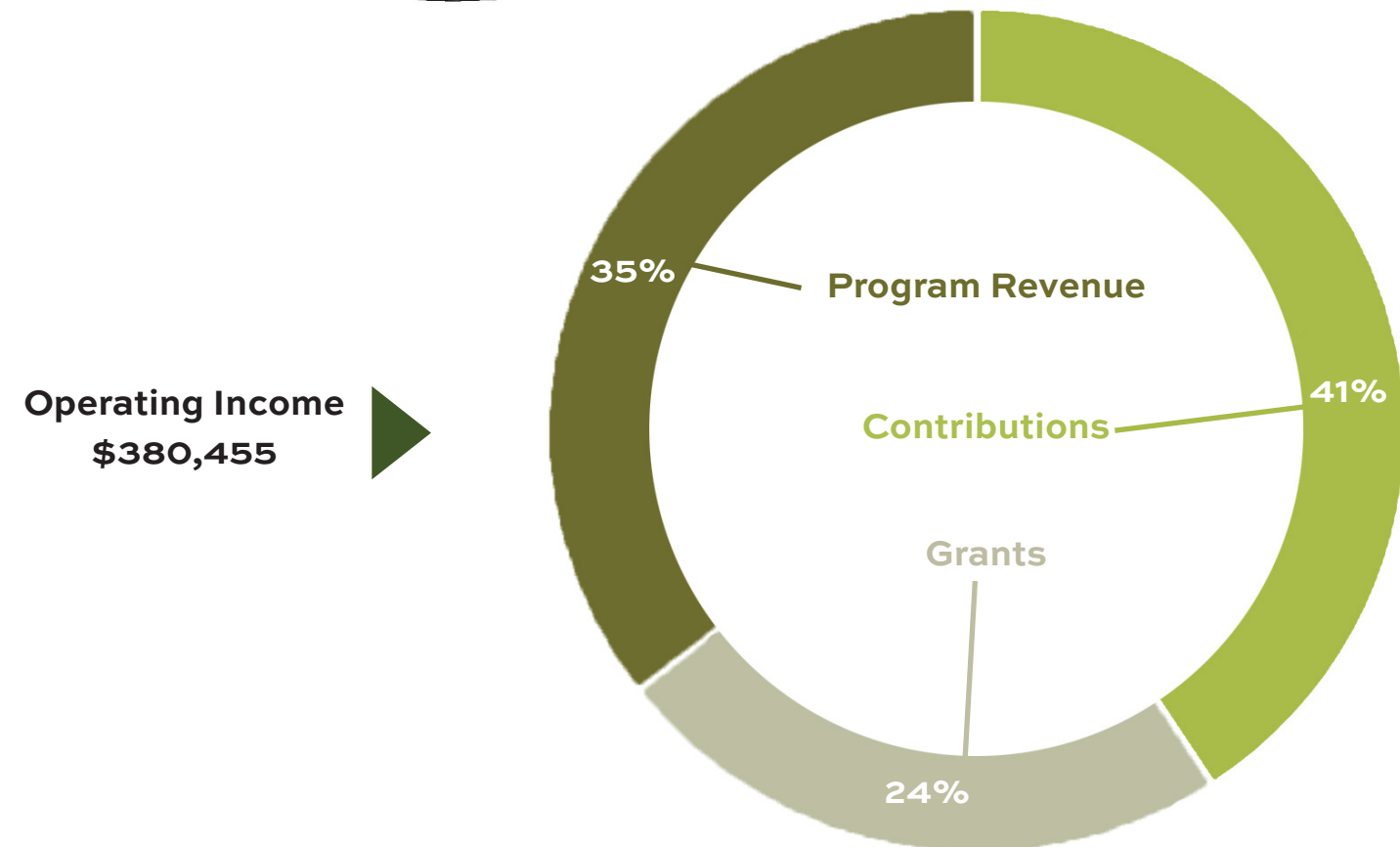
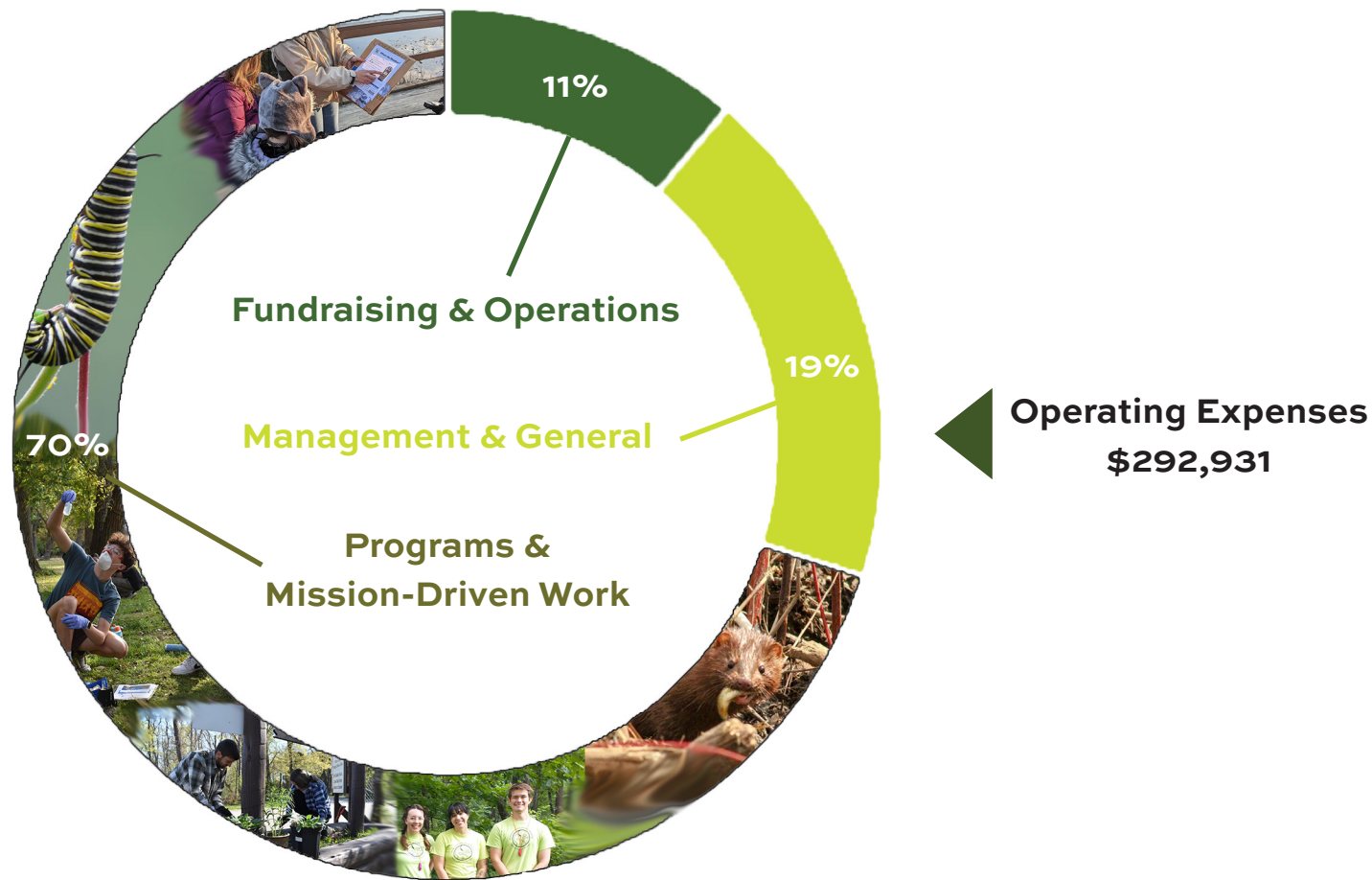


Assemblymember Monica Wallace joined us for I Love MY Parks Day in May and planted trees with a group of Girl Scouts.



Many of our founding board members joined us at the volunteer picnic this summer to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Friends of Reinstein Woods.

BY THE NUMBERS

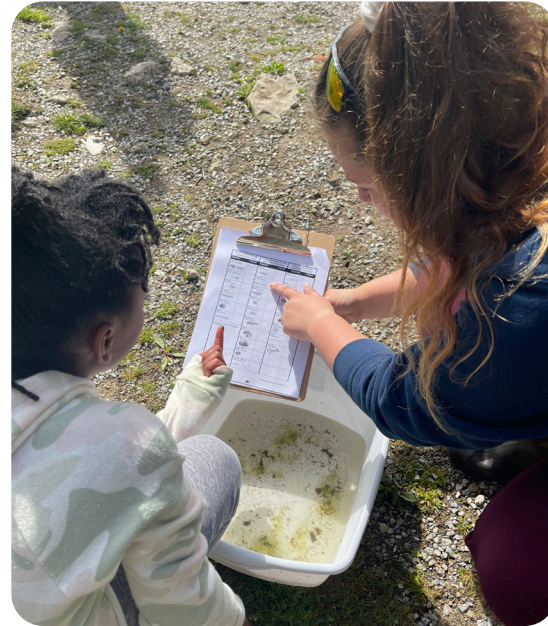


CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Leveling up Local Lesson Plans

The Niagara River/Lake Erie Watershed covers more than 2,000 square miles of land, 4,000 miles of rivers and streams, and 55 school districts in Western New York. With such a resource at our disposal, Reinstein Woods is always looking for ways to support educators in using the assets of our region to make learning and understanding global scientific concepts a unique and memorable experience for students. We believe that when you create hands-on or place-based opportunities for young minds, you tap into the curiosity that can turn into passion and help foster the next generation of scientists, naturalists, advocates and more!

To support these types of experiences, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and Friends of Reinstein Woods created the Niagara River/Lake Erie (NRLE) Classroom Program. In 2023, we wrapped up a NOAA B-WET Grant for this initiative. A key focus of this grant is ensuring that the educators in our region – who touch the lives of so many children – are supported, connected and empowered. Through our efforts, we've seen an increased level of confidence in leading Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) in ten WNY teachers. MWEE projects have already greatly expanded in the 2023-2024 school year! Examples of MWEEs are off-site field-testing days, shoreline sweeps, or creating a garden on the school campus.



Grants such as this are a wonderful way to leverage the generosity of our donors. Donations, alongside these grant dollars, allow us to think outside the standard curriculum and have a greater impact on the lives of our students and make science and environmentalism more accessible and enjoyable. “I liked to experience the fieldwork aspect of citizen science,” one student reported. “It really helped to narrow down what I want to go into for a career.”

The connections and networking opportunities we were able to create for the educators were also a huge success. “Through these network connections,” one teacher said, “students have been able to be the change in the world as conservationists to our own watershed instead of just knowing about it.” Having other educators to lean on, and contacts with community groups, allows teachers to create actionable and experiential learning opportunities that have a far greater impact than standard classroom lessons.



“I wish my teachers did this when I was in school!”



Sparkling Curiosity

It's no secret that teachers are faced with a slew of challenges. Changing curriculums and standards, students with lower attention spans and busier schedules, funding cuts – the list goes on. Sometimes it can be difficult to nurture a love of learning within young minds, but persevering against these challenges is just one reason why educators are superheroes.

For Nadezda (Nadya) Mease, becoming a teacher was a no-brainer. Growing up with a marine biologist for a mother inspired Nadya to have a constant curiosity of the natural world around her. "I really enjoy making an impact on future generations," she said. "I think science is really important for students because it taps into their natural human curiosity. And once they're interested in something, they try harder."

For the last ten years as a teacher, Nadya has always looked for ways to capture her students' interest. She was first introduced to Reinstein Woods through an educator workshop. For the last seven years though, she has been an active participant in the Day in The Life program that takes place each fall. This program allows hundreds of students to collect water quality data at sampling sites throughout our watershed on one day. This data is added to a global database.

"Science is outside," said Nadya as she reflected on the importance of giving kids hands-on experiences. "They love being in the creek. In the mud!" It always surprises her how many of her students want to get their hands dirty or get in the water. The Day in The Life program has become a tradition for Nadya. "My students always look forward to it," she said. "It's such a memorable experience that carries well beyond just a single day-long event. I have upperclassmen asking me to come back for it!"

Nadya shared that when she first started teaching, she had students that thought Lake Erie was the ocean. "They didn't realize what was around them," she said. "It's important to connect them to the world around them. Once they are connected, they care."



The Day in The Life Program would not be possible without the commitment of educators and the generosity of donors. Nadya has become a mentor teacher, helping other educators learn about the program and conducting tests at a sampling site of their own. "It just embeds the lessons in their minds more than what they do in a classroom," said Nadya. It's experience like these that not only spark a passion for science and the environment, but also nurture it.



Coming Full Circle

Just four short years after its inception, the Friends group helped bring the NYSDEC Environmental Education Internship program to Reinstein Woods. Since that day, we've had nearly 100 different interns come to the woods! As one of the longest standing initiatives of our organization, and with 2023 being a milestone year for our organization, we caught up with our very first intern: Jerry Krajna.

Jerry Krajna reflected fondly on his time as an intern, and he credits his experience and the lasting relationships it brought him as a significant influence on his life. "Whether I was volunteering, interning, serving on the board, or looking for guidance in my various jobs in the environmental field along the way," Jerry said, "I was able to get support because of the resources that were being provided by the dedicated staff, board and donors of Reinstein Woods."

Jerry now teaches Conservation and Aquaculture at Buffalo's Riverside High School. Friends of Reinstein Woods has provided him with teacher workshops which have helped plan impactful lessons with hands-on classroom resources. Through scholarships, we have sent some of Jerry's students to NYSDEC Camp Rushford, and he noticed a difference when they returned. "Those students returned to my classroom with a new perspective about the environment and it helped them become more engaged students in my program," said Jerry. He even has one student that went to Camp Rushford who is now trying to decide between a Biology or Geography & Planning major at Buffalo State University.

We think Jerry summed it up quite nicely when he told us: "I could not be the teacher that I am, nor give my students the opportunities they deserve if it weren't for the support I received and continue to receive from Friends of Reinstein Woods."

We're so grateful that we had the opportunity to check in with Jerry, but we're even more grateful for the generous support from our donors and members. Donations and membership dues help to support the internship program, as well as the other initiatives discussed in this report. Jerry's story is a fantastic reminder that an act of generosity today can still be influencing the world decades from now. Thank you for making these formative experiences for children and young people at Reinstein Woods possible!



LOOKING FORWARD

Protecting the Future of the Woods

Every year, we see the forest around us go through a cycle. The buds in spring, the full canopies in the summer, colorful leaves in the fall, and bare branches in the winter. If we look closer, we can notice a larger cycle happening as well. Trees will drop seeds that grow into seedlings, then saplings, and eventually become mature trees. Mature trees will eventually fall or die, providing habitats as snags, and eventually decomposing and returning to the soil to nourish future seeds. This outlines the ideal life cycle, but it doesn't consider the challenges that a forest faces. Blight, development, erosion, predation, climate change. The list goes on.

As part of our mission, Friends of Reinstein Woods is committed to the stewardship of the unique and diverse environment of the preserve. That's why in 2021 we commissioned the creation of a forest management plan to analyze some of the challenges that Reinstein Woods might face. One of the observations of this report warned that the severe pressure from deer predation will cause the forest to regress until there is no longer a mature forest at the site.

This is the motivation behind the many deer exclosures you may notice on a walk at Reinstein Woods. These small exclosures are great, however we wanted to create a bigger protected space that could also serve as a living example of the ecological biodiversity in our region. This is the vision of the Woodland Garden project – more than half an acre of enclosed forest space accessible to the public, but not to the critters that may impede the growth of the native wildflowers, plants and shrubs that will grow in the enclosure.

In 2023, Friends of Reinstein Woods was awarded a \$10,500 grant from the Environmental Protection Fund's Park and Trail Partnership Grants program to build an enclosure that will protect and establish the native forest as well as to improve public access and education related to forest ecosystems. Friends of Reinstein Woods raised a 10% match for the project. Materials have been purchased, and the area for the Woodland Garden has been surveyed and mapped out. The fence and gates will be erected by the Summer of 2024. The next phase of the project will be to create a planting design, acquire the plants and plant them with a path through the garden that will include information on the varying species of native flora that will thrive in this space.

The Woodland Garden will be a physical embodiment of our commitment to both the preservation of the forest, as well as creating accessible environmental education opportunities for all. It will also be a testament to the generosity and commitment of our community – our donors, our sponsors, our members, our volunteers, and our supporters. Thank you for making this important work possible so that Reinstein Woods will be accessible for generations to come!

The Woodland Garden project was supported with funding from the New York State Park and Trail Partnership Grants and New York's Environmental Protection Fund. The Park and Trail Partnership Grants are administered by Parks & Trails New York, in partnership with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

“Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, **the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects.**”

– Dalai Lama

The Ripple Effect

The Dalai Lama’s quote about the ripple effect is commonly referenced by nonprofits and educators. The sentiment has struck such a cord, because in this field, sometimes the actions we take today can have a larger impact down the road. One student can have a meaningful experience that may affect the course of their life, but impacts of this experience may not be tangible for years to come – like Jerry’s story on page 7.

Knowing that this is the nature of the environmental education work we do here at Reinstein Woods, we look at our programs through a pipeline model. Our vision is that our environmental education initiatives will influence and equip the next generation of environmental advocates, scientists, naturalists and more. This will ensure that outdoor places, like Reinstein Woods, have friends for years to come that believe in the importance of sharing in nature’s harmony.

In the Fall of 2023, we added another initiative to our pipeline: the Climate Connections for Buffalo’s East Side Youth Project. Friends of Reinstein Woods partnered with DEC, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, and the Omega Mentoring Program to connect students from the East Side with community leaders working on climate action. During the 2023-2024 school year, about 30 high school students will meet biweekly to go on field trips and work on environmental projects of their choosing. Reinstein Woods coordinates the field trips that introduce students to habitats and environmental issues in WNY while exploring business, nonprofit and government careers related to the environment. The Omega Mentoring Program, which operates out of the Johnny B. Wiley Center, ensures that the students involved in this program meet regularly to reflect on their experiences and create action plans for their futures.

Not only is this program a great fit for our pipeline, it’s an honor to be working with such great partners! Creating access to these experiences, such as experiencing Niagara Falls and the NY Power Authority Vista, or meeting with Buffalo Freedom Gardens founder Gail Wells, can have a profound impact on these students lives. They get to see real world examples of where they might be in just a few short years! By casting a spotlight on the opportunities they have, we can help them take the first step on their path to a future taking care of our planet and ensuring that nature is accessible to all.

This project is supported in part by Ingram Micro, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Connect Kids to Parks, and generous donations made to Friends of Reinstein Woods in honor of River DiLeo.



After-School Programming brings the outdoors to students’ schools and community centers.



Summer Day Camp gives kids a week full of outdoor experiences.



Climate Connections Program uses mentors and field trips to inspire and support kids.

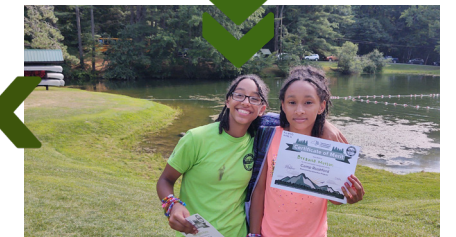


THE PIPELINE

A child may fall in or out of the pipeline at any point in time. The main objective is to create access to meaningful, hands-on nature experiences and suggestions on where they can go next to pursue their outdoor passions.



Our internship program gives experience to young adults interested in environmental careers.



We give a scholarship to a kid to attend Camp Rushford for an immersive outdoor experience.

Thank you to our corporate supporters



A group of Wegmans employees helped make our Artisan Market a huge success!



M&T employees came out to the preserve to help remove phragmites.



GIVING THANKS

Commitment and Connection

Change is inevitable. We see it on a daily basis, whether it's a new business in your neighborhood, a new book added to your reading list, or quite simply the changing of the seasons around us. While sometimes it seems overwhelming, it's also a constant in our lives to know that something different will be coming our way.

"Be open to change," advised Peter Buechi. He and his wife, Cheryl, have been volunteering at Reinstein Woods since the very first Fall Festival in 2001. While they do in fact have a very personal connection to this place – their daughter, Kristen Rosenberg, has worked at Reinstein Woods for more than 20 years – that's not the only reason they continue to support the woods.

"This place is such a blessing," Cheryl said. "It's a blessing to us and to the wider community. There's such a variety of programming!" The Buechis have been enjoying walks at Reinstein Woods for decades. They remember being on one of the first guided tours that happened after the DEC acquired the property from Dr. Reinstein in the late '80s. From the very first owl prowl, to the construction of the current education center, to the different programs, trainings and services offered, the Buechis have witnessed first-hand the growth of Reinstein Woods. They also see these as core examples of the significant impact this place has on the WNY community.

"The outreach that Reinstein Woods does to the younger people, the schools, and to have it available – the facilities here and the staff that are here to conduct training, and the summer camps to bring young people in," said Peter when reflecting on the impact of this special place, "it's just so important."

They are strong advocates for having a connection to the natural world around them, and view Reinstein Woods as an accessible place for all in a predominately urbanized area to create an appreciation for nature. Cheryl reflected fondly on always being outdoors as a child. Even when she was in the city, her family would find time to go out to her grandparents' farm so that she had to opportunity to connect with nature, and throughout their time together the two have enjoyed numerous camping trips and excursions!

Amidst all the changes in life and in the surrounding areas that the Buechis have witnessed, their values of giving back, helping others, and protecting the environment are a steady constant. "Volunteering is really important to us – sharing your time," said Cheryl. "And money is meant to be shared, too."



"We support a number of charities, and this is a good place to put your monetary support," said Peter. For the 20th anniversary campaign, the Buechis made a significant donation to help Friends of Reinstein Woods hit its goal of raising \$20,000. They did so by donating a portion of their required minimum distribution (RMD) from a traditional IRA after consulting with their financial advisor. This allowed them to support a charity that they strongly believe in while also removing the tax burden from the required disbursement.

"You can't take it with you," said Peter. "It's really important for us to share the resources that we've been blessed with." As longtime volunteers, members and donors, they appreciate that there are so many ways a person can make an impact through Friends of Reinstein Woods – whether that be volunteering their time or making a donation. They have made countless connections with other people who share their love and appreciation for nature through their involvement with Reinstein Woods. Not only has supporting this place kept them active, but it has created wonderful relationships with others. "It benefits the organization," said Cheryl, "but it also benefits us. If you are considering getting involved, do it!"

Lending a Helping Hand

We love the saying that 'many hands make light work.' Not only does working together make the task at hand easier, it's also more fun and rewarding! With nearly 300 acres at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, there's always something to work on.

"Our employees who volunteer all really enjoy being out there, being in nature and giving back to their community," said Christopher Knospe, program manager, Government & Community Relations at NYSEG. Born and raised in Cheektowaga, and even working a summer at Reinstein Woods, Chris is very familiar with the nature preserve and thought it would be a great fit for an Earth Day volunteer event. NYSEG's parent company, Avangrid, has a foundation with an "Energize for Good" program that encourages employees to give back to the community. When volunteer hours are logged in the program, the foundation also makes a \$15 per hour donation to the nonprofit where the work was done.

"It's really great because you get the sweat equity as well as financial support," said Chris. For two years, he has helped organize a crew of employees to come to Reinstein Woods to help us with anything from invasive species removal to painting the boardwalk. Both the volunteer efforts and the donations from the company have been a huge support in advancing our mission, and it's a great example of how companies and local businesses can get involved and serve as a friend to Reinstein Woods.

"We're committed to building healthier and more sustainable communities," said Chris. "And I think everyone wants to see good things happen in the community where they work, live, and play. This program is a vehicle to help them give back a little bit. They may not know where to start, what to do, or how to get involved, and this is just one of those mechanisms to help them get involved."





The Day in The Life Program gives students hands-on experience with different water sampling & testing procedures.

In 2023, our friends at Yogis in Service held a nature walk & outdoor yoga event, raising more than \$400 for Friends of Resintein Woods.



The 2023 Fall Festival welcomed more than 2,300 people to celebrate all that nature has to offer.



We expanded the Artisan Market in 2023, welcoming nearly 40 local vendors and crafters!



Our 2023 Earth Day Celebration featured an electric vehicle rally where attendees could speak with car owners to learn more about EVs.



14 educators joined us for a Summer Teacher Institute which combined workshops, field study and networking.

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