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**Indian Creek**  
**NATURE CENTER**

# 2021

## ANNUAL REPORT





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# A word from Executive Director John Myers



**G**oing into 2021 we had no idea what to expect. The pandemic was still unpredictable and derecho clean-up continued in full force. It was difficult to predict what the coming year would bring, but just like nature, the Nature Center is resilient and adaptable. Just as the forests began to regrow after the storm, we also saw the opportunity for growth.


The pandemic drew more people to nature as they sought a place of peace and calm in a tumultuous time. Thousands came out to visit the newly opened trails, experience the new Indian

Creek Exhibit, or simply explore the outdoors. Many were experiencing Indian Creek Nature Center for the first time.

We know that providing quality, in-depth experiences is important, especially when interacting with nature early in life. Through two education programs we were able to significantly expand this depth: Creekside Forest School and Fresh Air Academy. These programs each provide significant, immersive, multi-day experiences that give children the opportunity not just to delve into nature, but also to grow up in it.

When it comes to derecho recovery, our work looks a little different than other areas. Rather than conduct massive clear cutting and debris removal, our focus has been driven by a desire to increase the overall health of the forest. After selectively cutting dead or dangerous trees, debris is gathered into habitat piles which provide protection for wildlife, as well as nutrients to the forest floor as the piles decompose.

Throughout this report you will read about some of our proudest achievements in 2021, including:

-  Filling a community need for alternative early education with the launch of Creekside Forest School, one of few nature-based preschools in our area — read more on page 6.



- Bringing back our beloved summer camps, in addition to The Fresh Air Academy and other educational programming — read more on page 8.
- Improving land and water quality by completing dredging and restoration of the Lynch Wetland — read more on page 10.
- Increasing biodiversity and achieving organic certification at Etzel Sugar Grove Farm — read more on page 11.
- Celebrating decades of dedication, generosity, and successes of the Guild / Friends Group — read more on page 16.
- And much more.

Your support is what makes all of this possible. Without you, Indian Creek Nature Center would not be able to deliver its mission and create Champions of Nature. YOU kept us going through 2021 and are needed to propel us into the future.

*Thank you for all you do!*



## Financials

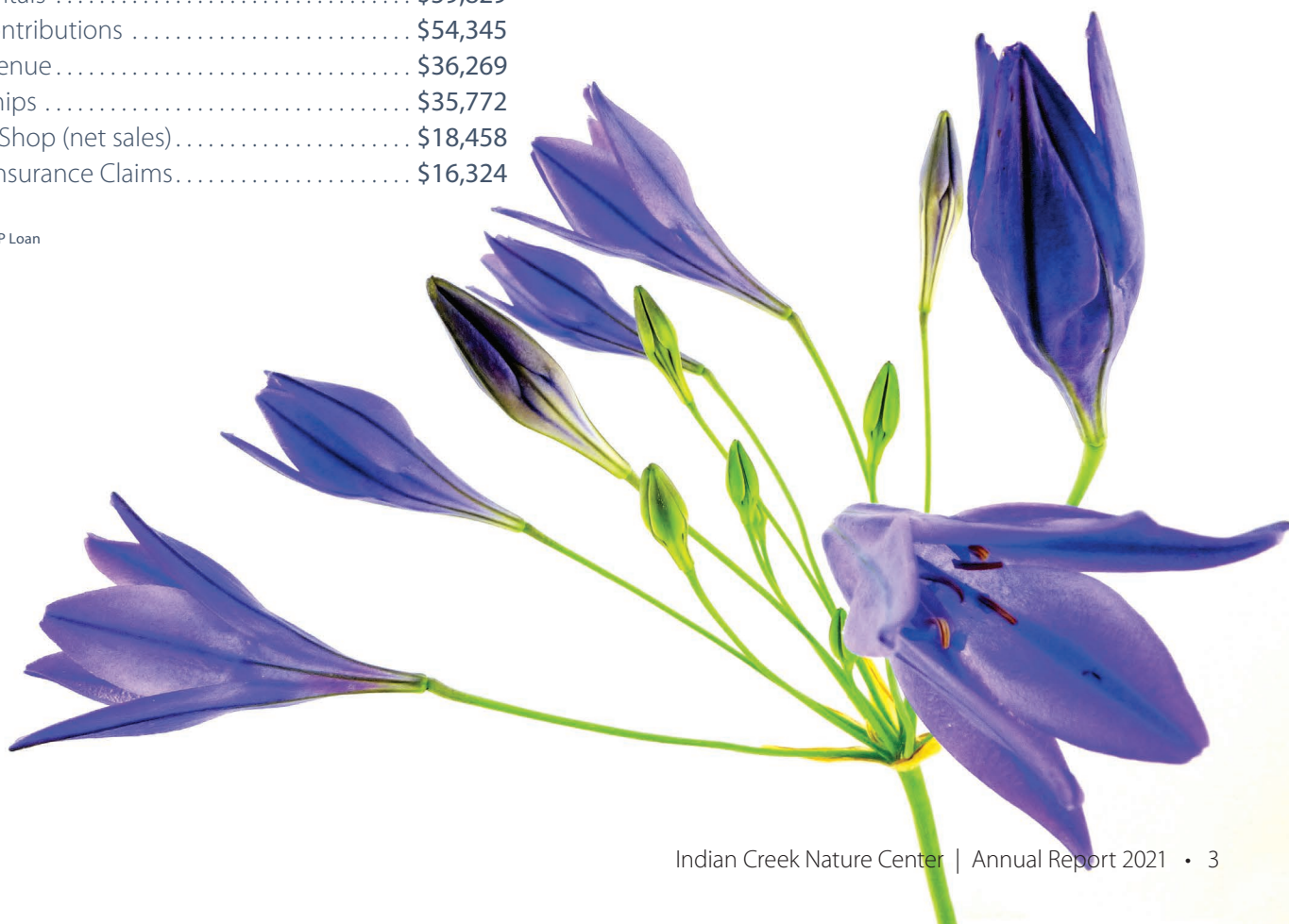
### Total Revenues — \$1,715,179

■ Contributions .....	\$719,417
■ Program & Farm Income .....	\$279,348
■ COVID Relief Funding .....	\$174,740
■ Endowment & Investments .....	\$127,442
■ Special Events/Online Sales .....	\$109,957
■ Grants .....	\$83,278
■ Facility Rentals .....	\$59,829
■ In-Kind Contributions .....	\$54,345
■ Other Revenue .....	\$36,269
■ Memberships .....	\$35,772
■ Creekside Shop (net sales) .....	\$18,458
■ Derecho Insurance Claims .....	\$16,324

\*Does Not Include PPP Loan

### Total Expenditures — \$1,758,324

■ Education & Programs .....	\$492,331
■ Land & Property Management .....	\$386,831
■ Mission Support .....	\$351,665
■ Development & Marketing .....	\$246,165
■ Administration .....	\$210,999
■ Experiences .....	\$70,333





# YEAR IN REVIEW

## Creek Exhibit Officially Unveiled

After more than five years of planning, crafting and, finally, installation, the long-awaited Indian Creek Exhibit was completed and opened for public viewing in early March. Since then, people of all ages and abilities have enjoyed the magic beneath the surface of our namesake, Indian Creek.



## Creekside Forest School Ribbon Cutting

In September we watched with glee as preschoolers burst through a handmade banner to mark the official opening of Creekside Forest School. There was magic in the air as we embarked on an exciting new chapter for the Nature Center. A dream long in the making, CFS is another example of how we continue to meet the community's needs and inspire the next generation of environmental stewards.



## Honey Ale w/ Lion Bridge

In partnership with Lion Bridge Brewing Company, we made a collaboration beer: Honey Ale! This tasty, expertly crafted golden ale was combined with Etzel Sugar Grove Farm's bees' bounty: just over 20 pounds of fresh honey! We debuted the beer at our new event, Trailside Tastings. It was a hit!



## One Year Post-Derecho

A year post-derecho, we're still mourning the loss of well over half of our tree canopy. But there's still room to celebrate the survivors. In honor of the anniversary, the staff shared some favorite trees and special places that exist on our property. Take yourself on the self-guided tour on our website to see for yourself!



## New Trail: Cedar Overlook

On National Trails Day in June, we reopened the majority of our trails to the public, including a brand new one: the Cedar Overlook trail. Named for a new feature created by the ferocious winds of the derecho, the peak of the trail overlooks the Cedar River through what remains of the amphitheater's woods. On a clear day in winter, you can see the sun glimmering off the water.

## Selling ORGANIC(!) ESGF Produce

In addition to our organic free-range eggs, we also began selling organic produce from Etzel Sugar Grove Farm this year in the Creekside Shop. Fresh produce included honey rock cantaloupe, golden beets, empress green beans, red burgundy okra, German hardneck garlic, and a variety of herbs. Produce will return again in 2022...stay tuned for what will be available and when.



## Jane Boyd Tree Planting

In May, Director of Land Stewardship Jean Wiedenheft and Director of Education Kelli Kennon-Lane led a small group of Jane Boyd students in planting a hackberry tree in the park across from the Jane Boyd Community House. We had a great time getting our hands dirty and learning about soil, worms, roots and more.







# Celebrating 5 AMAZING Years in our State-of-the-Art Facility

## A look at the past, present & future of our Amazing Space

It's hard to believe it's already been five years since Amazing Space was built. Time sure flies when you're hard at work inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards! But five is just a drop in the bucket of the nearly 50 years that the Nature Center has led in environmental stewardship, from land preservation to responsible building practices.

After nearly four decades in the Penningroth dairy barn — the original home of ICNC — it was time to address an aging space that was bursting at the seams. The Nature Center's programming and attendance had increased to the point where it was becoming increasingly challenging to meet the demand and serve more people. Visioning for a new building began after the flood of 2008, and increased in 2013 with the transition to a new executive director, John Myers. A capital campaign feasibility study showed ICNC must continue to grow, focusing on its roots in sustainability.

Not only would the new space need to meet the community's needs, it would also aim to be among the most sustainable buildings in the state (and, ultimately, the world). So began the multi-year and multi-million dollar Amazing Space campaign and pursuit of the Living Building Challenge. In addition to the environmental aspects of the campaign — constructing a regenerative building that would give back to the earth more

than it took — the campaign would also invest \$1 million into ICNC's endowment to increase the organization's long-term financial sustainability. In the end, the campaign exceeded its goal by 10 percent, raising more than \$7.6 million from individual donors, foundations and corporate sponsors. Construction began just down the road from the Penningroth barn, where a portion of land was purchased from the Bena family and another portion gifted by the city. The community buzzed with excitement.

Two years later, in September 2016, construction was completed. Amazing Space became the main headquarters of ICNC. Since then, the Nature Center has seen its annual attendance more than double — most years seeing over 81,000 visitors. Just three years after opening, Amazing Space was officially Living Building Petal Certified, acknowledging it as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world.

What started as a bold idea — to construct a regenerative building that would model sustainability in our community — has become a movement. Amazing Space is not only the model we set out to build, but also a focal point of local environmental education, land restoration and outdoor recreation. A dream come true. But, our work is never done. Even more *amazing* opportunities are on the horizon, thanks to the continued generosity and support of our community.





# PRESCHOOL

## Creekside Forest School sees success in pilot year

by Director of Education Kelli Kennon-Lane



It took just 12 months to create our dream nature-based school, Creekside Forest School. Planning began in mid-2020. The board and staff created the vision, developed a financial and curricular model, hired three teachers (two full time, one part time), became licensed by the Iowa Department of Human Services, and filled every open spot with an eager 3- or 4-year-old. In September we officially cut the ribbon and had our first day of school. It's been a whirlwind, but in the best possible way.

Of course, there have been plenty of challenges that staff, students and families have faced along the way. The Belief Statements that were foundational to the planning of Creekside Forest School also became our guideposts for confronting issues typical for a first-year school. These Belief Statements have also helped staff measure their success and make decisions.

### We believe in immersive outdoor learning.

Everything learned inside four walls can be learned outside, too.

"There are so many examples of how I have witnessed children becoming Champions of Nature, and a recent conversation I had with a CFS mother encouraged me to reflect a bit deeper," Assistant Preschool Teacher Morgan Bryant said. "She shared with me that her son, who was traditionally a child who enjoyed being indoors and playing video games, now enjoys the outdoors and, in her eyes, is thriving here at CFS. I began to think of all the other ways children enhanced their relationship with nature. I've seen children try something new like climbing a tree for the first time, talk about earth and life science, use observation skills while examining deer bones found on the trail, be resilient in the cold weather, and learn how their bodies work and feel on the land at different times of the year."

In early September we expanded our outdoor classroom with a new fenced area, named Forest Garden. It was landscaped by the Iowa Nursery and Landscaping Association for their 2021 Day of Service. Between Forest Garden and Hazelnut Hideaway visitors will find hollowed logs to crawl through and explore. In the spring of 2022 Artist-in-Residence Mary Kopecky will begin constructing a willow fort for children, aptly named Maple Tree Manor.



### We believe learning looks like play.

"Sledding was the best day ever," Preschool Specialist Betsy Bostian said. "Sledding provides students an opportunity to strategize and just have fun in the moment. I will never forget the laughs and screams as they flew through the woods into the prairie, the biggest smiles on their faces."

### We believe curricula can be guided by the seasons and take place in all weather.

Nature provides cues for the best topics of study. Some things are best learned in winter, for example. Other topics can be uncovered in all weather outdoors. Our teachers expertly plan with the seasons and student interest.

"We give children the autonomy to explore the land in the way they are called to," Bryant explained. "And by encouraging free play and designing curriculum based on the interest of the children, we are promoting early learning and development."





## ❖ We believe teaching and learning start with inquiry and occur cyclically.

"My favorite memory comes from one of my first lessons on hibernation. We read *Bear Snores On* and then learned a song about bears. The children loved it," recalled Bryant. "As we were transitioning to the bathroom we had a few extra moments. We headed over to the big logs near Forest Garden and the children came up with a new game called 'Where is Bear.' What was so beautiful about this was that the children worked together, came up with the concept, game rules, and a way to execute it with little support from me. It was a dream come true as a teacher, presenting a concept and letting children take it and run with it to make it their own."

## ❖ We believe in being environmental stewards and living lightly on the earth.

CFS students are taught the importance of composting, how to care for precious materials, and to experience the land in a way that is helpful rather than harmful. Generally, the school operates on a model that less is more, and children are supported to feel a sense of 'enough' while they are at school.

In 2021 we chose to address barriers for families who have the least access to nature-based preschool through the creation of a donor-funded scholarship program. Taking an equitable and inclusive approach, the overall goal is to diversify outdoor recreational spaces through greater representation. This scholarship will impact future generations and address racial differences that linger in outdoor spaces. Building a new type of tiered scholarship program that focuses on supporting children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, children from LGBTQ+ families, and young girls is yet another way ICNC is a leader in outdoor education.



Children attending Creekside Forest School were provided with outdoor gear to extend and complement their time outside in all weather conditions. The Gear Library is available to all CFS students at no charge and includes a winter jacket, snow bibs, snow boots, gloves, balaclava, rain boots, a raincoat, and more. Gear was purchased with Investing in Iowa Child Care funds through SOKO Outfitters, who procured the items during a time of extreme supply chain challenges while still providing a generous discount.

## ❖ We believe early childhood education fosters critical lifelong skills.

Based on our Back to School Fundraiser in August, it's clear others believe this, too. The number of in-kind donations received for Creekside Forest School was astounding. The donations — not only new items but also used or sometimes even foraged from nature — of indoor and outdoor classroom furniture and fixtures, curricular materials, art and sensory supplies, teaching tools, and outdoor gear will ensure students at CFS have a rich and rewarding early childhood education experience.

## ❖ We believe in celebrating the diversity of life.

The scholarship program we've created for children who have the least access to immersive nature education is a testament to this belief. Due to the generosity of donors, this scholarship program will continue to serve children in the 2022-23 school year and beyond. To contribute to the CFS scholarship fund, please contact Director of Development and Marketing Sarah Halbrook.



*After such a successful first year, we look forward to seeing our school — as well as the students themselves — evolve and grow. On a daily basis, we show children how to nurture themselves, this land, the plants and even the smallest insects on it. They learn about themselves, their peers, the earth, and the part they play in it all. The future is bright for our Champions of Nature.*



# EDUCATION

## Fun with Fresh Air Academy

by Education Manager Andria Cossolotto

**F**resh Air Academy has been a great, immersive, educational experience for not only the children enrolled, but also for staff who get to share the joy of exploring outside with them. While there are many special memories in a year of adventures, one memorable day gives a glimpse of what this wonderful program is all about.

After discussing how everyone's previous evening had been, we began with a lesson on the differences between vertebrates and invertebrates. Once completed, we started out on our first adventure: a hike where we wrote down every creature we saw,

from insects to birds and mammals, to name a few.

Kids are excellent spotters of critters and we had quite a list going when one of the kids said, "I see a puddle!" This became our first stop of the day. One of the kids picked up a stick and pretended to fish. It did not take long before he "caught" one. When asked about his catch the child declared it was a sunfish! We decided to add the imaginary fish to our list before continuing on.

By the time we stopped for a snack we had quite a

list: birds like woodpeckers and hawks, as well as insects, spiders and Armadillidiidae. As we ate we discussed which ones were vertebrates and which ones invertebrates.

Before we continued, I talked to the kids about birds. I showed them pictures of several birds along with replica eggs. We discussed differences in color and sizes of eggs. The kids soon noticed that the bigger the egg, the bigger the bird. They were amazed to see the difference between eagle and hummingbird eggs. One girl noticed her yogurt-covered raisins looked similar to a hummingbird egg. We held them next to each other and the hummingbird egg was smaller!

We continued on our hike and believe it or not, came across an egg just lying on the trail. Based on the size of the egg, they quickly deduced the likely size of the bird that laid it. I was not familiar with the egg, so I looked it up later. The next day I was able to let them know it was a northern mockingbird egg.

When we returned to Amazing Space we spent time hiding in the prairie grasses near the bird feeders to do some birdwatching. Despite their excitement at being so close, they sat very still so as not to spook the birds. When we were done observing, they enthusiastically shared their observations, including that some birds eat right at the feeder, whereas others take a seed and fly away to eat it. One child pointed out that the woodpeckers usually went to the green feeder (suet). We then discussed food preferences and beak shapes.

Soon it was time to wrap up and get ready for parents to arrive. The kids let me know that when they got to choose their own activities on that Friday, birdwatching and hiking would be on the agenda. While they were waiting for their parents, some of the kids asked if they could go into the prairie and look around. I said they could as long as they stayed close. They decided to hide and observe their parents. The giggles I heard coming from the prairie made my day.

*"I tell my friends that if they have a child who is a video game junkie (as my older son used to be), that they should do Fresh Air Academy. It opens up a whole new world to kids...the world of nature. It has been fun watching my boys get excited about rocks and leaves and bugs. I've seen maturity in my older son in other ways as well. He is more social and more calm. My younger son was really jealous last year that he couldn't join. He has been having a blast as well! Great programs and educators!"*

—Laura Barnett





# Soaking up summer at Creek Camps

by Senior Naturalist Emily Roediger



Creek Camps returned this summer, and while they looked different in some ways — smaller capacities and half days — they were also somewhat “normal,” too.

We always end each day of camp asking kids about their favorite parts of the day. Highlights from this summer looked and sounded a lot like summers before — kids got to hang out with other kids, meet animals, explore the woods, try to catch frogs and other animals at the ponds and wetlands, splash in the creek, play games, catch bugs, run through the prairie, go on hikes, roast s’mores, and more!

A moment that sticks out for me is playing a game of “Oh Deer” — a game from Project Wild where kids pretend to be deer and different parts of habitat. There is an educational component that illustrates some of the things animals need to survive in their

habitats, and also gives kids a chance to run around outside. In the past we’ve typically played with a group of at least 15 or more kids, but this summer our groups were often around 7 or 8. I wasn’t sure if the game would work as well with a smaller group, but when we tried playing with some of our “Food Webs” campers, the kids didn’t seem to care. If anything, they liked the game just as much if not more than kids normally

do. So much so that they didn’t want to stop playing. They kept playing until they got picked up by their families that day.



This summer, like summers before, we had campers who were returning from previous years, campers who were new to the summer camps and the Nature Center, and campers returning from programs like the Fresh Air Academy, field trips, Trail Trekkers or Scout programs during the school year. Even after a week at camp, kids still can’t get enough. We always try to encourage them to come back with their families or to attend another program or camp. I always enjoy seeing campers come back to visit!



Creek Camps were featured on Iowa Public Radio this summer thanks to 6-year-old camper Paloma Bribriesco. An IPR reporter followed Paloma at camp one day after learning about her involvement with the Iowa League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Climate and Environmental Justice Committee. Paloma attended multiple camps this summer — every camp we offered in her age group — including Nature Stories & Art, Wild Animals, and an Evening Campout. She shared with IPR that she wants to be an environmentalist when she grows up so that she can teach others about how to keep nature safe for people and animals.

“The less nature there is, then there’s less nature to support us, for us to thrive.”

— Paloma Bribriesco, 6-year-old Champion of Nature & Future Environmentalist



# LAND

## Focus remains on woodland restoration & trail creation

by Trail Builder Gabe Anderson

It has been a long and challenging road to recovery since the derecho. Together with volunteers, we have been working across our properties to chainsaw downed and dangerous trees. Areas of focus include the north woods behind Amazing Space and the amphitheater, the riparian woodlands that surround Wood Duck Way, and the sugar grove at Etzel Sugar Grove Farm.

We've cleared tangles of fallen cottonwoods, carefully dislodged perilous hanging limbs, and moved other problematic debris. Once cut and piled, fallen trees will still play a role in the forest. The piles make room on the forest floor for native seedlings and wildflowers to grow, while also providing habitat for wildlife. As the debris decomposes, the stored nutrients will return to the soil and feed the forest's continued growth. Fortunately, there are some ancient, beautiful oaks still standing, with little seedlings sprouting around them. A variety of native species, including sycamore, shellbark hickory, swamp white oak, northern pecan, and river birch will be replanted at Wood Duck Way.

In addition to debris removal, trail reconstruction is in progress in the woods behind Amazing Space, where former routes were

obliterated by the derecho.

Existing trails are being cleared and in many cases rerouted to minimize runoff. We hope to reopen the woodland trails in 2022. We are also creating a new trail in Věčný Woods, a portion of our property at the corner of 44th Street and Otis Road. This area has always been open to the public, but lacks trails. In 2021, we staked a route that will improve accessibility, but still needs a lot of work before opening. Roots and vines need to be removed; the walking surface needs to be smoothed; wood chips need to be spread in some places to improve the walking surface. This work will continue through 2023.

We are also creating a new two-and-a-half-acre prairie at Věčný in an open area along Otis Road. If you've driven past, you may have noticed the cleared area and brush piles. We removed trees, shrubs and invasive species such as honeysuckle and amur cork trees. We also uncovered a stand of native hawthorn trees which the new trail will meander through. It will take years before the prairie is fully restored, but the work is worth the reward.



## Restoration of Lynch Wetland has ecological and educational benefits

by Director of Land Stewardship Jean Wiedenheft

In 1999 we reconstructed a wetland that had been drained in 1859. The Lynch Wetland became home to grass pickerel and orangespotted sunfish. A pair of Canada geese nested on the island every year, and hundreds of children learned how to identify dragonfly nymphs along the banks. The wetland did exactly what it was designed to do: keep silt and other undesirable materials from flowing into the Cedar River and other waterways.

Eventually, the small upper pond silted in, becoming a mud flat. Late last year, with help from DuPont and Dave Schmitt Construction, the pond was dredged back down to its clay liner, removing an estimated 1,224 tons (approximately 138 truckloads) of excess silt! CFS preschoolers planted an oat cover crop and put straw along the banks to keep the banks stable until the prairie and emergent wetland plants can be planted next year.

You will notice a few related additions in the area, including a shed at the edge of the woods that

houses supplies for our wetland education programs and a freshly painted windmill that runs an aerator in the larger pond to keep the water oxygenated for fish year-round.

This project not only keeps our waterways clean, but also enhances our educational programming by reinvigorating a space for learning about our natural world. We are so grateful to all who made it possible.





# FARM

## Biodiversity builds...one seed at a time

by Farm Manager Scott Koepke



**E**tzel Sugar Grove Farm rebounded with resilience in 2021, including improved irrigation infrastructure, increased honey production, new poultry paddocks and, most exciting of all, organic certification.

Each growing season, farms of all sizes and crops must anticipate cycles of drought and flood. Were it not for the new irrigation system installed in the seven-acre Frontier Co-op Permaculture

Field, many of our young nut and fruit trees may have struggled mightily to survive. In the absence of timely rains, we can now activate water droplet delivery to each tree at the rate of one gallon per hour. The vegetable beds, although distinct from the tree lines, still have standard drip tape. After being dripped on for a few hours, all specialty crop beds receive a nice drink.



Drought cycles can also take their toll on honeybees, not only for the bees themselves, but also the plants from which they draw pollen and nectar. If need be, worker bees will fly several miles in one day to find water and plants. Despite these challenges, the hives at Sugar Grove produced more than 20 gallons of honey, which was not only sold in our Creekside Shop, but also incorporated into a special batch of honey ale brewed by Lion Bridge Brewing Company.

For our free-range hens we were able to double the outdoor space to 13,000 square feet by implementing a paddocking system. Paddocking allows for ground that, once depleted of plant life from chickens foraging, can be fenced off and re-seeded while the flock enters a fresh plot of botany and bugs upon which to feast and play. Each season we rotated paddocks to ensure a robust diet and engaging habitat for our happy hens.

Perhaps the crowning achievement for Etzel Sugar Grove Farm in 2021 was its official designation as “certified organic” for our permaculture and poultry operations. In February, after 36 months of documentation, compliance, and inspections, the Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA) granted our license. It was a long row to hoe, but well worth the benefits, both economically and ecologically.



Due to derecho damage, two barns and silos were beyond repair and removed in 2021. To expand the impact of Etzel Sugar Grove Farm, fundraising is underway to construct a 6,000 sq ft workshop which will have public restrooms and produce processing facilities. For more information or to donate towards this project please contact Sarah Halbrook.

The ancient wisdom of organic methods uses nature to take care of nature: we grow our own nutrients with cover crops, thereby increasing biodiversity, and attracting bugs that eat the bugs that eat our cash crops — the way nature intended. Unbelievably, I had very little pest pressure this season...we must be doing something right!

It's important to remember, too, that soil health is water health. Not only do higher levels of organic matter in soil retain hydration more effectively to get through drought, but organic methods significantly reduce the amount of synthetic chemicals that migrate into waterways. “We all live downstream” is one of my favorite environmental mantras.

As we continually and unavoidably adapt to Mother Nature, I am reminded of a Ralph Waldo Emerson quote: “Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience.”

*Farm Manager Scott Koepke has retired! We are grateful for his hard work and dedication to sustainable and organic agriculture. As we recruit the next farm manager, our focus is on growing partnerships, expanding organic certification, and increasing education about sustainable agriculture.*





# CLIMATE

## Taking action on climate change

by Director of Land Stewardship Jean Wiedenheft

The Nature Center has always focused on ways to reduce its ecological footprint and educate others on how to do the same. In the 1980's, we were an early adopter of solar panels and thoroughly insulating our headquarters building. In the 2000's, we offered programs on sustainable living. In 2016, we opened Amazing Space and demonstrated the best in sustainable buildings. We also expanded our programming to help homeowners interested in installing solar.

In 2021, we went further. As part of strategic planning, the board and staff decided we would further define our focus on climate change. We will align our mission-based activities with actions that reduce global warming, and will regularly review and update our internal operating philosophies to ensure we remain a leader in sustainability. This work will make sure we align with and fully support local and global initiatives on climate change.

The Nature Center also supported me serving on the City of Cedar Rapids Climate Action Committee. This citizen advisory board developed a Community Climate Action Plan that, in September, the City Council unanimously passed. The plan focuses on two

primary goals that will guide us in forging the future we want to live in. If fully implemented, by 2050:

1. Cedar Rapids will become a carbon-free community. Basic needs can be met within a 15-minute walk. Clean energy provides clean, healthy air. Walking, biking, and low-emissions public transit will be popular and accessible.
2. All residents of Cedar Rapids will have access to high-quality green space, healthy food, clean air and water, as well as good green jobs. Neighborhoods will be cohesive, and residents will help each other in getting connected to our rich community resources.

To see all 24 actions in the plan, their associated timelines, and how you can become involved in creating that more resilient and sustainable future, visit [www.cedar-rapids.org](http://www.cedar-rapids.org).





# CHAMPIONS OF NATURE

AMANDA WENDLING, BOARD MEMBER & PARTNER AT GRIT CAPITAL

## *How did you become connected to the Nature Center?*

My daughter and I attended Nature's Noel on a whim one year. It was a beautiful day in December, and it was love at first sight for both of us.

A short time later, I was able to tour the Nature Center with Executive Director John Myers. It was then I understood the impact the organization is making in terms of sustainability. I knew I needed to be more actively involved.

## *Why is the Nature Center important to you?*

Logically, I know the Nature Center belongs to the community, but emotionally, it feels like it belongs to me and my family. That's how personal a space it is. The last couple years have been so hard, and the Nature Center is a welcome, quiet retreat.



## *What are some of your favorite Nature Center offerings and why are they valuable to you?*

I am so proud of the preschool. I read about nature preschools several years ago and immediately thought: "Well, I guess we have to move now so our littles can have this experience."

To see the Nature Center turn such a hard time — shutdowns during a global pandemic — into

something so beautiful for our community is inspiring! It's an amazing example of innovation brought to life.

## *What has ICNC taught you about the value of nature?*

Immediately following the 2020 derecho, my family and I were volunteering at the Nature Center to help with clean-up. I got into a conversation with Director of Land Stewardship Jean Wiedenheft and asked, "Where do we go from here?"

And I remember her response being surprisingly upbeat. She talked about how ecologically the downed trees would be good for the land. It struck me as a reminder that even when it looks like destruction, nature is healing.

## *How would you define Champions of Nature?*

When I think about Champions of Nature, I think about my seven-year-old daughter. I see the way she both finds peace in nature, and fights for its protection so we are able to offer that peace to as many others as possible.

## *In what ways has ICNC impacted your life?*

Having a quiet retreat in our community is immeasurably important. But, when I think about the impact the Nature Center has on me personally, I think about the team. I learn so much every time I'm able to interact with them. They exude innovation, passion, hard work, integrity, and a constant desire to learn. These aren't people who talk the talk, they are literally out walking the walk. We are lucky to have them in our community!

KAVEH MOSTAFAVI, BOARD MEMBER AND FOUNDER/CEO OF ECOCARE SUPPLY, ECOCARE HEMP, & THE COMPOST NINJA

## *How did you become connected to the Nature Center?*

When Ecocare Supply acquired The Compost Ninja we took over the composting operations at the Nature Center. I was lucky enough to get a tour of the facilities and learn all about the building operations, which are all focused on being as sustainable as possible.

## *Why is the Nature Center important to you?*

The Nature Center shares the mission of Ecocare Supply/The Compost Ninja, which is to take every necessary step to reduce waste and the carbon footprint we have on our planet.

## *What are some of your favorite Nature Center offerings and why are they valuable to you?*

Maple Syrup Festival (YUM!) is always a favorite. I am very proud of the Creekside Forest School. It was a topic that the board debated during the pandemic and I am so proud that the decision was made to move forward despite the challenges.

## *What has ICNC taught you about the value of nature?*

After the derecho I realized how important our trees really are. The Nature Center did not focus on the devastation of the lost tree cover; rather, they immediately cleaned up and planned rerouting trails.

## *How would you define Champions of Nature?*

Those who actively pursue lives that incorporate the importance of reducing our impact on nature and the planet.

## *In what ways are you a Champion of Nature?*

I use compostable products vs. plastic. I compost my food, paper, and compostable packaging waste every day.

## *In what ways has ICNC impacted your life?*

The Nature Center sets the example. My team and I often mention the Nature Center as an example of viably incorporating sustainability into daily operations. I'm honored to sit on the board, where I get to experience firsthand the important issues facing the Nature Center. Each decision is made with a focus on sustainability.





# DEVELOPMENT

## YOU make it possible to achieve our mission

**ICNC SUSTAINERS** At the Nature Center, our mission is to promote a sustainable future. One way donors have chosen to do this is by setting an amount they donate monthly to ICNC. No need to remember — your gift comes to us monthly, quarterly or annually. Sustaining gifts help us weather the different seasons of giving throughout the year.

### Earth Day to Arbor Day Fundraiser

This new fundraiser raised a total of \$7,379.60 for derecho recovery and ongoing land restoration from 47 generous donors. This was above and beyond our **doubled** goal! Our woodlands, wetlands, prairies and the wildlife that reside there are grateful.



### Giving Tuesday

On Giving Tuesday ICNC gained six new Sustainers (five monthly and one annual), one new member, and received 21 one-time donations. A few weeks later we were pleasantly surprised by a \$4,050 combined gift from 19 Collins Aerospace/Raytheon employees, matched 2:1 by the company! Altogether for Giving Tuesday, donors and Raytheon gave a whopping \$15,114.25 (including \$803.40 projected annually from the new monthly donors).



### Věčný Woods Expansion

In 2021 we were able to share our vision for the 55-acre Věčný Woods project. We are hard at work restoring an abandoned farm field to a prairie and adding a parking lot. Around the prairie will be a trail built to accessibility standards. This will also be the access point for a new 1.5-mile trail with the steepest incline to challenge even the most seasoned hiker. Both of these projects at Věčný were supported

by lead gifts: prairie restoration by Heather and David Hayes, trail creation by the Ovel Family, and a \$10,000 gift from the Rotary Club of Cedar Rapids.



### Theisen's Farm & Auto

Thanks to Theisen's, our flock at Etzel Sugar Grove Farm is treated to discounted organic chicken feed, adding up to a total donation of \$1,440.38! The hens are happy and well-fed, thanks to Theisen's generosity. Don't forget to pick up a dozen of their organic, free-range eggs from our Creekside Shop next time you are out for a hike or program.



### SOKO Outfitters

Not only does SOKO Outfitters regularly sponsor many of our events, they also provide funding through special programs like Pint Night (a sip and shop event that donates a portion of proceeds to nonprofits like ours), as well as discounted gear for our preschool's gear library. The gear library provides every child attending Creekside Forest School a complete set of weather appropriate clothing for each season to be borrowed and then returned for future use. The Nature Center believes equity is an integral part of our educational programming and we are proud to partner with SOKO to support those efforts.



## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

We are lucky to work with so many individuals and organizations on a day-to-day basis. Many choose to give back to the Nature Center not only with monetary donations, but also with their time, in-kind (non-cash good or service) gifts, or in other ways.

### EDUCATION

Creek Camps sponsored by Alliant Energy and Toyota Financial  
Field trips sponsored by Linn Area Credit Union  
Other — International Paper

### LAND

Trail re-opening sponsored by ITC, Sunrise Builders, and Climate Engineers

### FARM

Ryan Companies • Theisen's • Hoover's Hatchery

### EVENT SPONSORS FOUND ON PAGE 15

### CRTO & GCRCF: Freebie February

In partnership with Cedar Rapids Tourism and the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, we offered 750 free vouchers to the community to use on ICNC programs or in the Creekside Shop.

### Veridian Credit Union: Spark the Spirit

Veridian Credit Union awarded ICNC \$500 through the Spark the Spirit campaign in which the public voted for their favorite local nonprofits to receive funding.

### Allegra: Footprint Fund & "Comeback" Sweepstakes

This year ICNC won a nationwide contest for \$500 in services from Allegra in addition to the \$500 Footprint Fund award. This funding offset the cost of printed materials and helps us connect with our community.

### Mercy Medical Center & MACook Design

This annual report would not be possible without the support of Mercy and MACook Design. Both partnerships have been in place for seven years and have allowed us to focus on content and creativity, not cost.



# EVENTS

## Maple syrup to go! Our first ever drive-thru MSF was a success

by Amazing Space Manager Sarah Botkin

After a year of canceled programs, we knew we needed to bring back our signature event, Maple Syrup Festival. But as the pandemic proved it was not going away any time soon, it did not feel right to hold the event in its regular format — large crowds eating together inside was a no-go. We decided to take our lead from other pancake breakfasts that had switched to a drive-thru format and developed the first ever Maple Syrup Festival drive-thru as a one-day-only event.

As always, our friends at Local Carpenters Union 308 were able to operate the grills and our faithful volunteers were ready to hand out meals. Online ticket sales continued to rise as the date grew closer, and on March 20th we saw a line of cars stretching along Otis Road all the way back to the Penningroth Barn. It turned out to be a beautiful day and was rewarding — and relieving — to see so many happy faces drive through the line after a year of virtual programming.



## Cheers to our all-new fall event, Trailside Tastings

by Outreach & Development Manager Jane Schlegel

One 2021 goal was to explore new ways to connect with the community. We know time spent outdoors is beneficial for health, particularly mental health, and we wanted to engage folks in a safer space — out in the fresh air — as the pandemic showed few signs of slowing down. We connected with local food and beverage providers and got to planning a brand new event: Trailside Tastings. We connected with local musician Blake Shaw, hired Blend Events to supply snacks, and planned beer stations throughout our beautiful prairie.

Despite the weather — we ended up moving to the patio to escape the rain — the event was a hit as we highlighted local businesses and shared trail restoration updates with an engaged audience, all to the tune of Blake's bass. We look forward to continuing this event as a way to introduce new people to the Nature Center and build community with all who attend.



## Maple Syrup Festival

March 20

**Sponsors:** F&M Bank, Alliant Energy, CIPCO, Bankers Trust, GreenState Credit Union, Rinderknecht, Evergreen Packaging, New Leader Manufacturing  
**In-kind:** Carpenters Union, Hy-Vee, Hansen's Dairy, Compost Ninja



## Spring Plant & Art Sale

April 21-28  
(Online)

**Sponsors:** CIPCO, GreenState Credit Union, New Leader Manufacturing, CR Association of Realtors, Kerndt Brothers Bank

## Practice in the Prairie

May-September



## Monarch Fest

July 10

**Sponsors:** New Pioneer Co-op, Hills Bank, CIPCO, GreenState Credit Union, CR Association of Realtors, Farmers State Bank, Kerndt Brothers Bank, New Leader Manufacturing  
**In-kind:** Monarch Research Project and Monarchs of Eastern Iowa



## Trailside Tastings

October 7

**Sponsors:** TrueNorth, IFF, The Linge Family, Collins Community Credit Union, Cedar Graphics



## Women in Nature

October 16

**Sponsors:** GreenState Credit Union, New Leader Manufacturing, CIPCO, Kliks Photography

## Nature's Noel

December 4

**Sponsors:** New Leader Manufacturing, CIPCO, GreenState Credit Union, CR Association of Realtors, Kerndt Brothers Bank, McGrath Family of Dealerships, Shuttleworth & Ingersoll, Sunrise Builders





# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AWARD

Friends recognized with AFP award for decades of service

by Senior Marketing Manager Liz Zabel



**A**fter 46 years of hosting fundraisers for the Nature Center, the Friends of the Indian Creek Nature Center (formerly known as The Guild) were awarded the Eastern Iowa Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Benjamin Franklin Award.

The Benjamin Franklin Award recognizes an individual or group whose commitment to philanthropy is demonstrably profound, and is an award that is not given out every year. The selection committee must feel strongly that the recipient is especially deserving, and it felt the Friends, having raised a whopping \$1,531,154 for the Nature Center over the years, fit that criteria.

The group took root in 1975 when sixteen women assumed the task of promoting and advancing the new Nature Center (founded in 1973, also by two women, BB Stamats and Jean O'Donnell). Beginning with its Fall Harvest Fest dinner for more than 300 people, the Friends have hosted more than 100 fundraising events over the years — including the Spring Plant & Art Sale and Nature's Noel, which provide critical funding for educational programming.

Masters at creating beauty out of the most humble of items, they produce glorious wreaths, centerpieces, and other creative holiday





“As an elementary teacher I brought many classes on field trips to the Nature Center. To see the wonder of nature through the eyes of a child is so rewarding. Away from the classroom and armed with clipboards, nature guides, and most importantly our senses, we visited several different biomes. We learned about native plants and predators and prey in the prairie, followed a trail exploring the layers of the oak savannah, listened to the woods in silence, and then learned how to identify a pine tree by keying its needles. Saving the best for last, at least in the kids’ eyes, we caught and observed dragonflies, water striders, tadpoles, sometimes a snake or a frog. At each location kids used real-life instruments to measure air speed, air and water temperatures, documented topography, etc. We BECAME the naturalists. My favorite memory is of Old Henry, a

very old tree, now gone. With our arms linked, we spread out and experienced the circumference of this majestic tree.

My story is not unique. Each of us here today face choices about how we can support our community by volunteering. Like Benjamin Franklin who saw a need in his community and led the way to the formation of the first volunteer fire brigade, two women, BB Stamats and Jean O’Donnell, wanted children in their community to have a place to learn about nature. A couple years later the Guild was born, a small group of dedicated volunteers who supported the goal to provide a place for members of our community to experience nature in all its glory. Over the years the group has grown and changed, but always kept the mission to provide opportunities for learners of all ages to become Champions of Nature.”

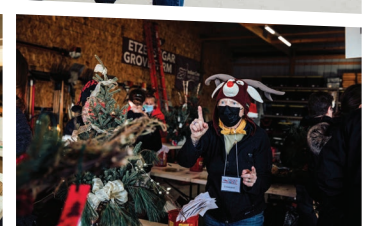
— Kathy Severson, President of the Friends of the Nature Center



decorations from donated evergreen branches, ribbons, and trinkets. They get on their hands and knees, digging wildflowers, potting, and nurturing plants before selling their bounty to enthusiastic gardeners in the spring.

Many in the group have been actively volunteering for decades, giving countless hours of their talents, skills, resources, creativity, energy, and enthusiasm to ensure children in our community have access to quality environmental education. Their generosity continues to inspire others to join them today.

It is easy to see the direct impact the group has had on the Nature Center when you add up the dollar amounts and volunteer hours, but the most important metric is their impact on children. Not only have their contributions paid the entire salary of a full-time naturalist each year, but they have also supported more than one million children in experiencing the benefits of nature. They ask nothing in return for their many contributions. We are extremely proud and thrilled to see them recognized for their achievements. Of course, most of all, we are immensely grateful for their kindness and generosity.





# THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS

For your time, talents, knowledge and passion

## Work Study Student: Ellie Jones

Many colleges and universities participate in the Federal Work-Study program which allows students to earn money to help reduce education costs. In September, Coe College student Ellie Jones began her work-study position at ICNC. She's added an extra set of hands to our land team, as well as during special events and rentals. We

are grateful for all the contributions Ellie has made in the short time she has been with us!



## Wednesday Warriors

Wednesday Warriors is an eclectic group of outdoors-loving volunteers. Most are retirees, but from time to time young adults have also joined in. The group tackles weeding, mulch hauling and spreading, removing trash along Otis Road, collecting prairie seed, hacking out invasive plants, splitting and stacking wood, and "other jobs as assigned." They are critical to making the Nature Center's mission happen every day!



## CFS Parent Volunteers

Creekside Forest School welcomes parents and family members of currently enrolled children to volunteer with the class. Family volunteers serve in a variety of ways — they help prepare and serve snacks, hold hands on the trail, support teachers with prep and clean up, and experience nature in all weather alongside the children and teachers. If a family member has a certain area of interest or expertise, we welcome the chance to showcase it for the whole class.







## 🌿 Special Programming: John Donner & Neil Bernstein

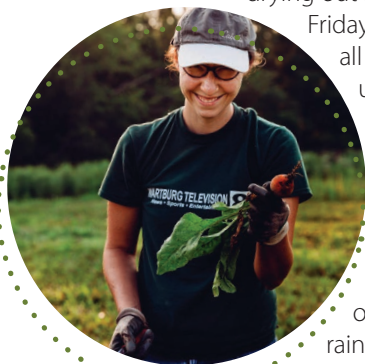
We introduced two new programs free and exclusive to members, donors, and volunteers: a tree ID hike with volunteer John Donner, and an online lesson on woodpeckers with ornithologist Neil Bernstein. John showed adventurous snowshoers how to identify trees in winter, including clues like recognizing bark and branch characteristics. Neil impressed Zoom attendees with a history and evolution of downy and hairy woodpeckers, which may look similar to the untrained eye, but each have very different evolutionary paths! We are fortunate to have such knowledgeable and gifted volunteers, willing to share their time and talents with others!

## 🌿 Friday Farmers

Young trees need a lot of tender loving care. They need heavy mulch to suppress weeds and increase organic matter in the soil. They need tree guards to protect them from deer and rabbits. They need regular irrigation to protect small, shallow roots from drying out and withering. They need the

Friday Farmers! Every Friday morning, all year long, volunteers showed up at the farm to lend a helping hand. They laid dripline for the trees, hauled thousands of wheelbarrows of mulch across the field, and weeded the trees and vegetables. Then they weeded some more. They came out in the blazing sun and the frigid rain. They helped with a multitude

of tiny projects that keep a farm running smoothly and looking good. Some day, you will be able to enjoy local honeyberries and pecans thanks to their efforts.



## 🌿 Linn Mar Venture Program

This fall, students from the Linn Mar Venture Program helped us collect seeds for 2022 prairie plantings. Venture gives students opportunities to earn high school credit while connecting with local businesses and experiencing potential careers they may be interested in. We are thrilled to see Champions of Nature interested in protecting nature for future generations!







 **Indian Creek**  
NATURE CENTER  
5300 Otis Road SE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52403

Our very first Creekside Forest School cohort "cut the ribbon" on our brand new nature-based preschool in September. On the cover you can see Preschool Assistant Teacher Morgan Bryant guiding our little Champions of Nature back to Amazing Space after a morning of fun and adventure. Learn more about CFS on page 6.

Indian Creek Nature Center is Iowa's first and only independently owned and operated nonprofit nature center. ICNC's mission is to promote a sustainable future by nurturing individuals through environmental education, providing leadership in land protection and restoration, and encouraging responsible interaction with nature. We create #championsofnature, and we hope you'll join us in fostering environmental stewards who are passionate about nature and will protect it into the future.



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