

THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY **OUTDOOR**ISSUES

SUMMER 2022

Five Scholarships Awarded to Future Conservationists



Sumbel Yaqoob



Amanda Baksa



Oluwafemi Soetan



Dorothy Helmken



Sara Haas

Five college students from New Jersey are going back to school this fall with \$7,500 of their tuition paid for, thanks to The Land Conservancy of New Jersey's expanded scholarship program. For 38 years, our organization has been awarding scholarships to students pursuing degrees in environmental studies and aiming for careers protecting the Garden State's natural resources. This year we were able to increase the number of scholarships from three to five, thanks to a generous gift from the Rochkind-Wagner Foundation.

Our 2022 scholarship recipients embody many of our values, including leadership, racial and gender equity, and a passion for protecting our natural resources. See for yourself!

Sara Haas is a junior at Duke University pursuing a double major in environmental science and biology. She found a passion for conservation when she worked in the Pacific Northwest restoring public lands damaged by wildfires. Sara's interest in sustainable agriculture led her to the Duke Campus Farm, where she works using traditional agricultural methods.

Sumbel Yaqoob is a graduate student in chemistry and environmental science at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Her research involves using microbial techniques to remediate sites impacted by per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)—harnessing nature's own potential to protect natural resources in a sustainable way.

Dorothy Helmken is getting a master's degree from Drew University to achieve her goal of improving student engagement in the environment through education. She develops place-based environmental education opportunities that are geared towards improving student engagement with and understanding of environmental issues like water and air quality, biodiversity loss, pollution, and connection with the land.

Oluwafemi Soetan is a doctoral student in environmental science at Montclair State University. Femi's studies focus on environmental toxicology, water resource conservation, and environmental policy.

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His research investigates the remediation of ecologically imbalanced freshwater ecosystems that have been negatively impacted by human activities. He is passionate about influencing policies on water resource conservation and global water security.

Amanda Baksa has worked with the NJDEP for ten years, currently managing the AmeriCorps New Jersey Watershed Ambassadors Program. She is a proud graduate of Montclair State University, where she recently returned to pursue a master's degree in sustainability science and leadership.

Talk about an impressive group! We can't wait to see where they're headed.

REMEMBERING HARRY GERKEN

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Harry Gerken, who we worked closely with for many years. His contributions to open space preservation in northern New Jersey and to The Land Conservancy will not be forgotten. With his help, we were able to negotiate a very delicate arrangement to stop a development near Clyde Potts Reservoir in Mendham and Randolph, protecting the 900-acre watershed while also extending Patriots Path through Morris County so the public can enjoy the land.

Harry, who was executive director of the Southeast Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (SEMCMUA), was so pleased with the project that he agreed to join TLCNJ's Board of Trustees. Harry continued as a generous supporter of our work through last year.

David says, "The preservation of the Clyde Potts Reservoir and watershed is one of The Land Conservancy's signature projects, and we never could have completed it without the dedicated and enthusiastic support of Harry Gerkin. I always appreciated his help and guidance and will miss him."

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



Director of Development & Communications Amber Ray

Do you remember the first time you dug your hands into the earth, tucking a tiny seedling into the ground? It's such a small yet powerful action when we kneel in the dirt to nurture the plants and flowers that aid in providing the clean air we breathe and healthy food we eat.

In July, The Land Conservancy staff had the pleasure of hosting kids from the Boys & Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic at our pollinator meadow at South Branch Preserve. They planted baby milkweed, discovered junebugs, and learned how to identify poison ivy. We toured the farm run by our friends City Green and harvested yummy veggies. This field trip was the culmination of our inaugural pollinator program, an education initiative to bring nature to young people who don't have easy access to the outdoors. For many of them, it was their very first gardening experience.

For most of them, it was their very first trip to a nature preserve and/or farm. (Read more on page 4.)

From that act of inviting others to learn about and experience the natural world, so much can grow—not only important plants that attract the endangered monarch butterfly, but also a love for the environment. Sharing this passion—The Land Conservancy's mission—is vital in growing our community of eager and engaged citizens who prioritize the health of the environment.

In the face of ever-present threats to local and global green spaces, it's imperative that we encourage more people to be advocates for land preservation, stewardship, and education. Ensuring our communities and planet can thrive is work that must be done collectively.

As the new director of development and communications at The Land Conservancy, I'm excited to meet our members and learn about your connections to the environment. I'm looking forward to further developing our outreach programs and strengthening this force for good.

I'm rolling up my sleeves, eager to dig in and see what we can grow together.

Have a question or story to share? You can reach me at aray@tlc-nj.org or (973) 957-7195. I'm looking forward to your feedback!

Sincerely,

GET MORE FROM THE LAND CONSERVANCY

If you enjoy this newsletter, follow us on social media and sign up for our mailing list. You'll receive occasional dispatches from the field and learn about conservation issues, our preserves and programs, the people and organizations we partner with, and what we're working on in your area. You can also visit tlc-nj.org to read our blog.



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The Birds & the Bees: Boys & Girls Club Pollinator Program



Throughout the spring we visited the club in Paterson to show students a different facet, from making clay sculptures of these important insects to exploring the different foods that rely on pollinators.

In July, the children visited the meadow at South Branch Preserve to get hands-on with nature. They planted 100 milkweed seedlings, discovered junebugs emerging from the soil, ate pizza, and made land art.

Then farmers Emily and Joe from City Green gave us a tour of the regenerative farm at South Branch Preserve, where the kids picked and sampled veggies with a delightful enthusiasm. A magical day overall—we can't wait to do it again!



In the spring we launched an outdoor education program with the Boys and Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic, where students learned how important honeybees are to food production, interacted with beekeeping equipment, and planted milkweed seeds.



The Pollinator Program was so successful that we're already making plans for next year. And we hope to replicate it with other education groups so even more kids can learn about and experience the importance of nature.

How One Family Created a Legacy of NJ Conservation

Campgaw Farm is a productive farm of 125 acres straddling Blairstown and Hope townships. It grows corn, hay, soy, and is home to a small number of cattle, goats, and pigs. On June 24, Campgaw Farm was permanently designated as preserved farmland. This is good news, of course; preserving land is vital to a healthy future for the Garden State. And this property adjoins existing preserved farmland, which will help maintain the pastoral character and agricultural economy of the region. But what makes this event special?

The real story here is about Bud Schwartz and his family's long history of land conservation in partnership with The Land Conservancy of New Jersey. While using our expertise to preserve land, we also build long-term relationships. Our history with the Schwartz family is a prime example of this.

As a lover of land, Bernard A. "Bud" Schwartz purchased various properties 60 years ago as an investment. But as the years went by, he came to believe that some land should remain undeveloped. Over the years, he demonstrated this over and over: 110 acres of woodland in Hardwick preserved as woodland; a 316-acre farm in Knowlton preserved as farmland; 12 acres in Franklin Lakes preserved as open land; and recently Campgaw Farm.

We first got to know Bud in 2016, when we worked with Franklin Lakes to preserve his 12-acre property, an important piece of natural land in the midst of suburban development. While working in Franklin Lakes, Bud's son David also came to learn more about The Land Conservancy's work. When the purchase was completed in 2017, it was the largest privately owned property remaining in the borough.

Later, The Land Conservancy acquired 170 acres from the Schwartz family that became our Nancy Conger



Two hikers-in-training enjoy the memorial stone bench Bud Schwartz's family had installed at South Branch Preserve.

West Brook Preserve. This property contains the headwaters of the West Brook, which had been diverted decades ago. This preserve has become the site of some of The Conservancy's most important work—a successful stream restoration project that is improving the quality of drinking water for millions.

When Bud passed away in 2019, his family made a generous gift that jump-started our South Branch Preserve Stewardship Endowment to maintain and improve South Branch Preserve, which contains the headwaters of the South Branch of the Raritan River. And then, on June 24 of this year, The Conservancy preserved David's 125-acre Campgaw Farm in Hope and Blairstown.

It's strong, sustained relationships like these—with landowners, donors, communities, government entities, and other partners—that make The Land Conservancy of New Jersey as successful as it has been over the past 41 years.

The 13th Annual Gray Cup Was a Hole in One



Over 100 guests, including 80 golfers, came together on June 20 to spend the day on a world-class course and raise money to support the future of conservation. It was our best event yet, bringing in a record-breaking \$135,000 to support land and water conservation, stewardship of our preserves, and restoration projects all over the state.

The atmosphere was playful and celebratory, but that doesn't mean the players didn't take the game seriously! Plenty of them came ready to tackle this challenging course, practicing on the driving range and the putting green before the noon starting time. The weather was perfect, 70s and sunny with a few fluffy clouds, which made the day even more enjoyable.

Cocktails and dinner followed, and the atmosphere was festive. President David Epstein and Board Chair Andy Dietz spoke passionately about The Land Conservancy's work and where the organization is headed. Andy introduced our newest project, the Pinelands Preservation Fund, and waxed nostalgic about his childhood in the Pine Barrens. We were honored that two of this year's scholarship winners, Femi Soetan and Amanda Baksa, joined us for dinner as well.

Special congratulations to this year's Gray Cup winners Christopher Golding, Patrick Sullivan, Tim Rittenhouse, and Logan O'Connor, pictured here with

former board member Rick Simon. The contest was very close, but they earned their award!

The Gray Cup Invitational Golf Classic is named in honor of former board chair Gray Rogers, who had a remarkable impact on The Land Conservancy of New Jersey. Under his leadership, we grew from a regional land trust to a state leader in open space preservation. Gray had a passion for the outdoors and the natural world, which he channeled into his work on our board of trustees and used to establish our scholarship program. His passing in 2021 was a huge loss, but the Gray Cup will continue to honor his legacy, year after year.



New Climate Station at South Branch



Pictured above is the headwaters of the South Branch of the Raritan River, which starts in Budd Lake, a natural body formed by a glacial remnant, and joins up with the North Branch in Bridgewater before eventually emptying into the Raritan Bay on the Atlantic Ocean.

TLCNJ has partnered with the Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) to install a Mayfly Enviro DIY Climate Station at South Branch Preserve. RHA's Sentinel Climate Stations Project uses these climate stations to collect and transmit continuous data on stream temperature, conductivity, and water depth so it can be viewed and downloaded by municipal decisionmakers, scientists, educators and students, fishing clubs, and state environmental agencies. This data could help future NJ municipalities develop climate resilience plans in their master plans that are required by the state.

Freshwater resources face significant threats from climate change. This is especially true of headwater stream ecosystems, which rely on cold, oxygen-rich conditions to supply clean water to much of the planet's population. Increasing temperatures can result in more cases of mosquito-borne diseases, decreased availability and delivery of drinking water resources, longer growing seasons for aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, and restricted recreational activities.

Data is needed to inform decisions on our water sources' vulnerability to climate change and the steps necessary for effective resilience and adaptation planning. We're doing our part at TLCNJ, but we all have some way we can be part of the solution for a healthy planet where we humans (and our fellow living things) can thrive. For example, you can google the NJDEP SEEDS program for volunteer opportunities to monitor water quality in your area.

WHAT THE HECK IS A MAYFLY DATA LOGGER?

EnviroDIY Mayfly Data Loggers are autonomous, low-cost, open-source sensor stations being deployed in streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, and stormwater infrastructures to measure water quantity and quality. Tethered by cables to sensors underwater, these electronic sentinels stand inconspicuously on the bank of the waterway and stream data to users in real time from the cloud.



Satoni Zaccaro Named 2022 Sargent Intern

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey is pleased to name Satoni Zaccaro as the Richard M. Sargent Intern for 2022. Satoni is doing an incredible job managing our Boys & Girls Club pollinator program as well as the Community Garden at South Branch. The Morris County Park Alliance clearly agrees, because they awarded us a 2022 Palmer Internship Grant to support Satoni's work.

Students are an integral part of The Land Conservancy's work, assisting our professional staff and infusing the organization with a sense of youthful energy and enthusiasm. We pride ourselves on offering interns a meaningful and active work experience that expands both their résumés and perspectives. And in exchange, we benefit from superstars like Satoni.

