

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

SPRING 2024

Outdoor Education Blooms



Two years ago we began our Pollinator Program to help children from urban areas who don't have regular access to nature gain opportunities to visit The Land Conservancy's preserves and learn more about the outdoors. As we worked to get the program off the ground, the Pollinator Program was carried out by an Outdoor Education Intern. In 2023, we got very lucky and found an intern who was such a good fit that she found a permanent home with us.

Van Trat spent her first year with the organization developing our Pollinator Program with the Boys and Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic. Her work was impressive, evidenced by the grant awarded by Morris County Parks to support Van's position. Then in the fall, Van was chosen as TLCNJ's Richard M. Sargent

Intern. We established the Sargent internship in 2007 as a sustainable, ongoing way to hire talented students to work with our staff, which benefits both the students and organization. It was established in honor of Dick Sargent, a dedicated conservationist who served as a trustee for more than a decade. Dick's energetic devotion to the outdoors was embodied in his work, and he used his corporate background to support our land preservation efforts.

Similarly, Van brings an energy and creativity to the renamed Outdoor Ambassador program. In the letter she wrote on page 3 you can read in Van's own words what this opportunity means to her. Through her dedication and results, the transition from intern to

(Continued on page 2)



THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY

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THE LAND CONSERVANCY OF NEW JERSEY
19 BOONTON AVENUE | BOONTON, NJ 07005
PH: (973) 541-1010 | WWW.TLC-NJ.ORG

Outdoor Education, cont'd

permanent employee felt natural. Van is the ideal choice to oversee and grow this program so we can help more and more children access and understand nature, from how ecosystems work to where our food comes from.

Amber Ray, our Vice President of Development and Van's manager, says, "Van's passion for sharing the natural world with kids was obvious from the start. She had the experience and enthusiasm we needed to strengthen our burgeoning outdoor education program, and recognizing her with the Sargent Award is a well-deserved honor. I am thrilled that thanks to the support of a couple who have been longtime members of The Land Conservancy, we are now able to hire her as our full-time Education Manager. Van is already doing a great job reaching out to new partners and developing additional curriculum so we can empower even more students to become ambassadors of the outdoors."

We're so happy to have you on board, Van! And we are grateful for the outdoor experiences you're creating for city kids in New Jersey.



Students from the Boys & Girls Club of Paterson & Passaic had tons of fun digging and planting in the pollinator meadow at South Branch Preserve last summer.

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



We know that preserving and restoring open space is vital. So how do we empower young people to continue the work? In order to sustainably fulfill The Land Conservancy of New Jersey's mission, we need to inspire children to connect with nature through environmental education. That's where my role as Education Manager comes in.

I began working for TLCNJ in February of 2023 as an environmental education intern to continue another round of the Pollinator Program that successfully piloted in 2022. Working with the kids from the Boys & Girls Club of Passaic was a great experience, especially the outdoor field trip at South Branch Preserve. Some of the kids returned from the previous year and some were newcomers. Their awe at spending a day in a natural environment surrounded by trees, grasses, and flowers was evident.

When I was young, I had the privilege of playing outside in a nearby forest with neighborhood

friends. We would look for bugs crawling under rocks, collect colorful leaves in the fall, and relax in the shade of the trees in summer. My inner child is thankful to be able to use the outdoors in my professional career and help inspire children to connect with nature.

Working with kids who do not have easy access to the outdoors is an honor. I get to be an outdoor ambassador, assuring them that nature is for them—in fact, that nature is for everyone—and that spending time outside can be fun! I love hands-on activities like planting milkweed, showing them insects buzzing over the pollinator meadow, and harvesting fruits and vegetables at City Green Farm at our South Branch Preserve. My hope is that this unique experience sparks an appreciation for nature in them, which then inspires them to become future environmental stewards.

I am excited to begin my position as Education Manager to connect more children to the outdoors and bring them out to our preserves for educational programming. My current focus is to connect with kids who do not have easy access to the outdoors. Therefore, if you are looking to provide your kids with a new and fun experience, you can reach me at vtrat@tlc-nj.org or (973) 302-5578. I'm looking forward to connecting with you!

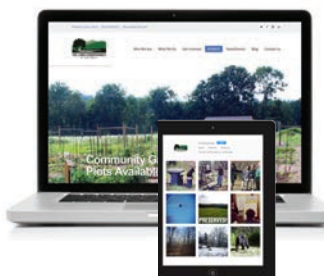
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, reading "Van Trat".

Van Trat
Outdoor Education Manager

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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Stewardship Endowments Fully Funded

Stewarding natural lands is long, slow, unglamorous work—and yet it's an essential aspect of environmental conservation. Stewardship is clearing invasive plants, mowing, patrolling, cleaning up debris, gradually creating conditions so the land can remain healthy without human intervention. It's easy to get excited about other aspects of The Land Conservancy's work, like ambitious restoration projects. But donors who support stewardship are saying that they trust our methods and our determination to make a better future for New Jersey.

In 2020 we launched a stewardship endowment campaign in honor of the late Jason Andris, a long-time trustee who had a deep love for South Branch, our premier 400-acre preserve featuring family-friendly trails, picnic areas, a community garden, City Green Farm, pollinator meadows, and forest restoration sites. The campaign was successful, but we needed \$215,000 to fully fund the endowment. Similarly, Yards Creek Preserve required \$100,000 in order to be able to maintain the natural features of these 322 acres and be able to maintain trails and other infrastructure.

Amazingly, recent gifts from generous donors have fully funded these stewardship endowments. In past years, our stewardship work relied on funds we could raise during the year. But now we have the resources necessary to take care of our remarkable preserves well into the future. These endowments will also help us plan for and maintain trails, remove invasive plants and enhance both wildlife habitat and the outdoor experience for visitors. And the money we raise annually can go toward preserving new land and embarking on new ventures. We are tremendously grateful to the individuals who understood these needs and were compelled to fulfill them.



40 Years of Farmland Preservation



Earlier this year we preserved another farm with the Kimball family—45 acres in White Township where goats, like this cute kid here, are raised and corn, hay, and soy are grown.

There's a sense of accomplishment every time we put a new farm into preservation, but when you add up all that land, it's a grand total of 105 farms and 7,904 acres. Zoom out again to see how many farms have been saved in New Jersey Farmland Preservation's 40-year history, and the number is staggering, especially for our small, densely populated state: 250,000 acres!

This milestone would not have been possible without the strong commitment of all the county, municipal, and nonprofit farmland preservation partners, and the farmers and farmland owners who permanently protect their land. Farms remain an important part of the Garden State's economy, its community, and the everyday lives of all NJ citizens. Let's keep up the good work!

Scholarship Helps Advance Urgent PFAS Research

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey considers it part of our mission to support future environmental leaders pursuing degrees in environmental science, natural resource management, conservation, park administration, and related fields. For the past 40 years we have been awarding scholarships, starting with just one in 1984. This year we are proud to offer six! So if you are a college or graduate student from New Jersey studying environmental science or a related environmental field, then keep our scholarships in mind for 2025.

Our scholarship winners are doing truly remarkable work. Take, for instance, Sumbel Yaqoob, a 2022 winner who has continued to thrive as a graduate student at NJIT, embarking on important research and founding the university's first DEIJ organization for graduate students.

Sumbel has chosen to study the urgent public health issue of PFAS, the “forever chemicals” that are toxic even at extremely low levels and have made their way into our waterways and bodies, posing significant risks to our health. She recently won a prestigious National Science Foundation research fellowship to continue this important work. Sumbel wrote to us about how TLCNJ's scholarship impacted her (her note is to the right).

Our staff and trustees are currently reviewing 58 scholarship applications for this year's six \$10,000 awards. Soon we'll have a new crop of award winners to admire. Where will their hard work and ambition take them?

Thank you again for the generous scholarship. I am pleased to say that I have continued my studies in environmental science, with a specific focus on the biotransformation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the environment, specifically behavior of PFAS when cultivated with antibiotic resistant bacteria. While there has been a significant learning curve and other difficulties in conducting this work, I have been able to purchase additional research materials and attend conferences where I can learn more about the latest developments in PFAS research. Through this collaboration with other researchers in my field, my newfound knowledge and understanding of the topic has allowed me to swiftly overcome the hardships and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on this important topic.

Overall, I cannot express enough how grateful I am for the scholarship and the impact it has had on my studies and career path. It has allowed me to pursue my passion for environmental science with greater focus and given me the resources to learn more about my field, meet other professionals, and draw upon the science community to bolster my research.

Thank you once again for your support, and I look forward to updating you on my progress in the future!

Sumbel



Featherfoil Find Wins Land Ethics Award

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey was recently awarded the Land Ethics Award for Best Large Scale Project by the 24th Annual Land Ethics Symposium, hosted by Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. The nomination highlighted the 2023 bloom of 200 endangered American Featherfoil (*Hottonia inflata*) that appears to be the result of our organization's restoration work at Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve. This beautiful, feathery flowering plant has densely whorled leaves and floats on the water. New Jersey is one of 11 states in which American featherfoil is critically imperiled, and we had never seen any in the years that we've been working at and observing the West Brook site. That is, until our land guru Sandy Urgo spotted the colony last year.

The appearance of this amazing and rare plant appears to be directly related to The Land Conservancy's efforts to restore the West Brook headwaters' ecology and hydrology. The restoration at Nancy Conger West Brook Preserve has been successful and gratifying on many levels, but the discovery of this rare and critically imperiled plant species is an outstanding and unforgettable



culmination of years of hard work for an organization whose mission is to preserve and restore critical conservation land in the state of New Jersey.

For a conservationist, it doesn't get better than this! Our entire staff contributed to this effort, and we are all quite proud.

Montville's Much-Needed Greenway Grows

We are delighted to announce the preservation of 20 acres in Montville—a significant piece of land positioned over the Towaco Valley Aquifer, Montville's primary source of drinking water for the community that serves approximately 6,750 individual properties. This land is also located in a Critical Water Resources Restricted District, where excessive groundwater usage threatens the long-term sustainability of fresh water supplies.



TLCNJ worked diligently with the town to prepare a successful Morris County Grant to acquire this important piece of land. Highlands Council mapping identifies the majority of the property as critical wildlife habitat, with a high forest integrity score. The dominant forest overstory species is tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), which grows up to 90 feet and has beautiful flowers that are yellowish-green and orange.

A much-needed natural haven in the midst of residential developments, this property will become part of a 143-acre greenway that contains a critical wildlife habitat, hospitable to barred owls, bobcats, and northern goshawk.

This year we're celebrating 25 years of outstanding service for Barbara Heskins Davis, our skilled and devoted Vice President of Programs. Barbara leads The Land Conservancy's award-winning municipal services program, which has completed 200 open space and farmland preservation plans to help guide local land preservation efforts, as well as helped New Jersey towns receive \$250 million in federal, state, and county grants for land preservation and preserve 20,000 acres in their communities.

Constantly striving to improve our organization, Barbara led our original effort to achieve national accreditation in 2009, and she was instrumental in updating TLCNJ's strategic plan to include DEI as a benchmark for organizational success. Her extensive expertise makes her a frequent speaker at local and state-level workshops on open space acquisition and planning.



Barbara also built our robust fellowship program and has been a mentor to dozens of young interns and fellows, offering training, advice, and valuable on-the-job experience that prepares them for ambitious careers in planning and conservation.

It's clear to her colleagues, peers, and the conservation community at large that The Land Conservancy of New Jersey wouldn't be what it is today without Barbara's hard work and commitment. Her love for nature is deep and genuine. She is an avid bicyclist and enjoys riding the beautiful roads and trails of New Jersey.

"Barbara is one of the most talented and dedicated conservationists I have ever met," said TLCNJ President David Epstein. "Collaborating closely with her over the past two and a half decades has been one of the highlights of my job."

Greetings & Farewells on Our Board of Trustees

We are always sad to see trustees leave the board, but we remain grateful for their service. This certainly holds true for Dennis Krumholz, who served as a trustee for 13 years and chair of our Land Acquisition Committee for a decade. Dennis said, "It has been a pleasure to serve and contribute with such distinguished leadership. I have enjoyed my time on the board but wants to give others the opportunity to serve. I wish the organization and all involved continued success in the future."

Fortunately, the sting of losing a trustee comes with the opportunity to welcome new ones, and we are fortunate enough to have two new strong additions to our board. John Maurer was vice president and treasurer of Foot Locker for the past 17 years, managing \$2 billion in corporate financial assets before his recent retirement. Before that, John held senior positions in finance

at Lucent Technologies and AT&T. He has two grown sons and two lovely granddaughters, and he lives with his partner Rachel in Green Pond, where he sits on the Lake End Corporation board of directors and is co-chair of its Environmental Committee. John is an avid outdoor enthusiast, with a special affection for cycling and birding.

We also welcome David Broderick, a retired partner at McCarter & English, where he specialized in corporate transactional law. David and his family enjoy the many preserved lands near their home in Rockaway, including Wildcat Ridge, Beaver Creek, and Jonathan's Woods. He currently serves as chairman emeritus of the Appleseed Public Interest Law Center of New Jersey, and for the past 30 years has been an adjunct professor at Seton Hall Law School. David enjoys fishing, boating, and swimming in his free time.



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OF NEW JERSEY

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Join Us for the Gray Cup

Join us for the 15th Annual Gray Cup Invitational Golf Classic on Monday, June 17!

Whether you come for the golf tournament, the golf clinic, or the great party afterwards with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and dinner, this promises to be a wonderful day to preserve the landscapes we love.

Proceeds will benefit The Land Conservancy's programs to protect New Jersey's land, water, and wildlife. Scan the QR code or visit tlc-nj.com/golf to register and learn more.



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