WISE beyond our YEARS

Celebrating Our 50th Anniversary

the acorn

BLANDFORD IN A NUTSHELL
2018
In This Issue

Welcome to the 2018 edition of The Acorn: Blandford in a Nutshell. In this issue, we’ll explore our 50th anniversary, get an update about The Highlands and spotlight some of our most dedicated volunteers.

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2017 Annual Report

“Nothing is accomplished unless somebody cares.” — MARY JANE DOCKERAY

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About
Blandford Nature Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that believes children and adults learn best through personal experience in nature and with wildlife. Our job, and our passion, is to invite our community to get their hands dirty in nature—whether that’s standing knee-high in water to learn about stream ecology or planting squash seeds to start a garden. This is accomplished through an active outdoor environmental lab, a team of passionate, knowledgeable people and a strong link from past to future, promoting sustainability. Blandford offers a wide variety of experiences to support our mission and vision.

Mission & Vision
The mission of Blandford is to engage and empower our community through enriching experiences in nature. Our vision is a thriving, diverse community that supports a healthy, natural world.

Values
INCLUSION Intentionally welcoming and embracing everyone.
STEWARDSHIP Responsibly using and caring for all our resources.
INTEGRITY Demonstrating honesty, authenticity and transparency within our organization and community.
EXPERIENTIAL Providing opportunities to enjoy, explore and learn in nature.
PARTNERSHIP Connecting and collaborating to effectively serve our community.
INNOVATION Using creativity and curiosity to continuously improve.

Staff & Board Members

ADMINISTRATION
Jason Meyer
President & CEO
Jessa Bitting
Executive Specialist
Jaime Dobson
Finance & HR Manager

PROGRAMS & SERVICES
Amber Kilpatrick
Community Programs Manager
Diana Klein
Program Manager
Kristin Tindall
Master Naturalist
Mandy McIntyre
Environmental Educator
Mary Rose Jones
Environmental Educator
Allyson Arndt
Environmental Educator
Heather Lewis
Environmental Educator
Katie Janecz-Soltesz
Environmental Educator
Katelyn Nettler
Volunteer & Outreach Manager
Liz Visser
Farm Manager
Taylor Cook
Farm Animal Program Specialist
Mark Cleveland
Farm Sales & Production Associate
Molly Froysland
Seasonal Farm Associate
Lori Lomoro
Wildlife Manager
Sarah Chertos
Wildlife Education Specialist
Sue Van Damme
Visitor Services Specialist
Alison Dopke
Visitor Services Associate
Katie Pathius
Visitor Services Associate & Seasonal Groundskeeper

OPERATIONS
Jennifer Brown
Chief Operating Officer
Julie Batty
Land Stewardship Manager
Art Goetsch
Maintenance Manager
Katie Baker
Custodian

DEVELOPMENT
Emily Evers
Director of Development
Kathleen Scaglione
Development Associate
Antonio Bailey
Marketing & Communications Manager

BOARD MEMBERS
Mary Jane Dockery
Founder
Bill Dangi
Chair
Bill Faber
Vice-Chair
Ryan Podvin
Treasurer
Justin Remmelts
Secretary
Sara Armbuster
Andy Beachnau
Linda Brunzell
Sharon Doyle-Holton
Laurie Gardner
Pat Gelderloos
Bryan Harrison
Randy Hansen
Ryan Huppert
Susie Meyers
John P. Schneider
Zachary Verhuist
Fifty years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson was in office, Redwood National Park was created in California, the Boeing 747 made its maiden flight, the 911 telephone service started in the USA, and Apollo 8 became the first manned space mission to orbit the moon.

Fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 was signed. The Tet Offensive in Vietnam was launched. Gloved fists were raised at the Olympic Games to protest violence against African-Americans. It was a time of innovation and conflict. As Smithsonian states, “Movements that had been building along the primary fault lines of the 1960s—the Vietnam War, the Cold War, civil rights, human rights, youth culture—exploded with force in 1968.” It has been referred to as “the year that shattered America.”

Something else happened 50 years ago: Mary Jane Dockery founded Blandford Nature Center. At that time, the mission was simply to “get feet back on the ground.” With everything going on in the world, it was a place where people could take a deep breath and commune with nature. For 50 years, Blandford has been a respite for our community—a place to find solace, quiet and gather thoughts to focus on what is important. It has been a place of wonder, excitement and love for nature and between people. Mary Jane helped create somewhere we could come back together to learn and celebrate one of the most critical things that we have in common—the natural world that sustains us.

“I hope an enthusiasm for nature will be an asset for the world & its future.” — MARY JANE DOCKERAY
Fifty years later, I find myself wondering how 2018 will be remembered. What I can say is, 2018 was the year Blandford Nature Center both looked to our past and also envisioned a brighter future. We are committed to ensuring everyone in our community, regardless of race, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socioeconomic or immigration status, has access to the natural world.

We have intentionally welcomed groups who have been marginalized for decades, raised money to help those with financial barriers become participants in our programs, and have shown Blandford to be a safe place where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect while fostering an atmosphere of diversity, inclusion and equity.

Fifty years from now, we envision that Blandford will be a thriving, diverse community that supports a healthy, natural world. Unfortunately, this may not be easy to achieve given the current fractures in our world, but we are committed to doing the hard work... the uncomfortable work... when and where we can. Blandford Nature Center is not a place for just some of us. It is a place for all of us and we welcome you.

— JASON MEYER
PRESIDENT & CEO

Highlights from The Highlands

Since purchasing The Highlands in January 2017 in collaboration with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, the property has already seen change. Thanks to the dedicated work of the Land Conservancy, asphalt cart paths and pumping stations have been decommissioned or removed, barbed wire has been taken down, and the fencing between The Highlands and Blandford no longer exists. Invasive species are being identified and controlled, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has funded and constructed a new wetland behind the clubhouse, which has already become home to several species of wildlife. The surrounding area was cleared via a prescribed burn and then reseeded with native plants. Finally, over two miles of temporary trails have been mowed.

The property officially opened to the public in July 2017, and since then we’ve seen countless visitors enjoy the space year-round. Our organizations are currently working closely with the team of OCBA, Cardno, & FTCCH to develop a master plan that includes significant community engagement. By the end of this year, a master plan for the 121 acres will be finalized, with a vision for the space to thrive and engage our community through nature for decades to come.
50 years closer to nature.

I grew up on a farm, and when all the chores were done, my friends and I would go to Collins Woods and just hang out with the critters and get our feet on the ground. Throughout my life, I noticed not everyone had a place to do the same, so the idea was to have a place for people to enjoy the outdoors and learn about it at the same time.

When I learned that the owner of the property was Victor Blandford, I called him to let him know I was trespassing with bus loads of kids during my time working at the Grand Rapids Public Museum. The director of the museum at the time, Frank DuMond, and I explained to the Blandford family the purpose of a nature center and they gave us our original ten acres. From breaking ground in 1968 on the original visitor center to now, it’s amazing to see how far we have come. Nothing can be accomplished unless somebody cares, and as I went along, plenty of people cared enough to make Blandford what it is today.

There is nothing that can take the place of literally being in nature... smelling it, hearing it, seeing it and absorbing it. To me, that is what Blandford is all about. From the very beginning, the biggest thing in my mind was to get feet back on the ground—the real ground. Now, for more than 50 years, we have successfully been doing just that. My hope is that we continue to immerse families in nature for the next 50 years and beyond.

Mary Jane Dockray
Founder

Blandford Founder, Mary Jane Dockray, circa 1966.
If these woods could talk...

Our visitors find a lot more than strength in numbers. From our number of acres and diversity of wildlife, to our enrollment statistics and sustainability commitment, good data at Blandford means better experiences, educational opportunities and natural enlightenment for our whole community.

Though we’re proud of how membership and land stewardship have grown, it’s the intangible—and often immeasurable—benefits that make Blandford a place for fellowship and friendship. You can read some spotlight statistics in this newsletter, but you’ll have to plan a trip out here to feel the rest.
There’s nothing bland about it.

While simply taking in the scenery is always a visitor favorite, our landscapes are packed with things to do for all ages. Whether you’re looking to exercise, relax, give back or make memories, there’s a path here worth following.

We asked our community to share what brings them here, and how getting in touch with the great outdoors has left a lasting impact.

KWE

BLANDFORD SUMMER CAMPER “I love Summer Day Camp because it’s a different experience each week, such as feeding all the birds of prey or playing with the turtles. My favorite animal is Elsa the mink because she’s an albino mink which is cool and rare to see. I want to attend a different week of camp next year so I learn new things and make new friends.”

BILL & ANNA

BLANDFORD BOARD MEMBER (Bill) “I think Blandford is such a fantastic place because it gives everyone access to nature. I use it regularly to see wildlife and be outdoors. We also come here as a family to pick up our CSA produce from the farm. Blandford has been an integral part of our lives for over 20 years.”

BLANDFORD CAMP AIDE (Anna, Bill’s daughter) “Blandford is a special place for me since there aren’t that many places in the city that you can go and be in nature and just be free. I love running here, volunteering here every summer, and seeing families spend quality time together in the outdoors.”

SARAH

WILDLIFE EDUCATION SPECIALIST “Blandford is special to me because it’s where I started my career as an educator and where I realized my passion for sharing nature with others. I get to experience the best of both worlds with wildlife and outdoor education, so I love seeing the combination of the two come to life everyday.”
BLANDFORD VOLUNTEERS “Blandford is a spiritual place for us... it’s quiet, it’s beautiful and it’s nature in the middle of the concrete canyon. We like volunteering because we can give back and contribute to something bigger than ourselves. It’s rewarding and has become an important part of our lives.”

BLANDFORD FARM MANAGER “The Blandford Farm is a short walk west of the Visitor Center where we raise healthy farm animals and grow certified, naturally-grown produce. We grow 40+ veggies for our Community Supported Agriculture shares and sell at the Fulton Street Farmers Market. The farm is an important aspect for our vision of a thriving, diverse community that supports a healthy, natural world. It is unique to have a small farm within the city and we hope to connect people to locally-sourced food and nature by engaging them with the Blandford Farm.”

BLANDFORD SUMMER CAMPER “I like Blandford because there’s a lot of nature outside and they protect a lot of animals. Everyone makes me feel like I belong, and when I grow up I want to work for Blandford as a naturalist or environmental educator.”
Growing the extra mile.

LAURIE GARDNER
921.75 LIFETIME HOURS OF SERVICE

Outstanding Advocate Award
This award goes to an exceptional BNC board member that has been seen as “Blandford’s Biggest Brag” out in the community. We are so lucky to have a Board Member like Laurie to advocate all of the good things that BNC is doing out in the community. The amount of care and love that she brings to this place demonstrates her generosity of spirit and her ability to make things better than how she found them. Blandford certainly wouldn’t be the same without Laurie around!

61ST DISTRICT COURT
301.75 2017 HOURS OF SERVICE

Bigger Picture Award
This award goes to a special "Mission Encompassing Community Partner" that helps us be involved further in our community. BNC and 61st District Court’s 12 volunteers have partnered for several years in order to give court-ordered volunteers an option in their service placement. Through this partnership, Blandford successfully helps community members achieve their service hours, while 61st District directs talented individuals to take on many of BNC’s tasks and projects.

MARCIA MARTIN
501.75 LIFETIME HOURS OF SERVICE

Frontline Award
Marcia Martin is an incredible volunteer who has been with us for years as our hospitality hostess, our organization queen and Saturday schoolhouse extraordinaire. Marcia is the perfect example of what it looks like when a volunteer goes the extra mile to live out our mission through her generous service.

15,462 VOLUNTEER HOURS
45 VOLUNTEER GROUPS
2,380 VOLUNTEERS
By the numbers.

1,500+
TOTAL MEMBERS

2,001
TOTAL DONORS

2017 EXPENSES
$1,102,444
PROGRAMS

$161,322
MANAGEMENT & GENERAL

$215,051
FUNDRAISING
TOTAL: $1,478,817

2017 REVENUE

GIFTS (INCLUDING CAMPAIGN*)
$2,554,827

PROGRAM FEES
$232,211

IN- KIND
CONTRIBUTIONS
$120,000

MEMBERSHIPS &
ADMISSIONS
$90,108

GRANTS
$65,046

INVESTMENTS &
DIVIDEND INCOME
$114,514

INVESTMENT GAINS
$185,398

OTHER
$71,306

NET ASSETS RELEASED
FROM RESTRICTIONS
$1,007,875

TOTAL
$4,431,285

*Fundraising for a $10.3 million campaign began in 2014; the majority of the income vs. expense surplus supported the previous costs of a new visitor center and growth of our endowment as part of this campaign.
**If it’s in your nature to nurture.**

Gifts of all sizes make an impact in supporting our mission. Last year, over 2,000 donors made a donation to support Blandford.

Without continued support, we would not be able to educate and empower the community in a sustainable way. Donors allow our mission to come to life through donations year-round. Our two giving societies include:

**CIRCLE OF STEWARDS** This program is for donors who want to create a philanthropic plan that goes beyond their lifetime to benefit Blandford Nature Center’s future. Planned giving extends your support to the organizations or causes you love, and leaves a legacy for future generations. These gifts can include bequests, gifts of insurance, retirement accounts or stocks and charitable trusts.

**ACORNS TO OAKS GIVING SOCIETY**

This program provides like-minded individuals a chance to plant the seeds for positive, lasting change through three giving levels, each representing the promise of an annual pledge over a three-year duration.

**ACORNS $1,000** each year will help us cultivate lasting growth by providing education for our youngest visitors.

**SAPLINGS $5,000** each year will help us engage older students and families as we teach environmental ethics through school and community programs.

**OAKS $10,000** each year will support the many possible partnerships and forge relationships that affect positive care for the natural environment of West Michigan.

“**The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.**”

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON
Get Out Here

Our 1,500+ members make a daily impact by supporting our mission through their annual membership—totaling $63,137 of our revenue in 2017. This goes directly back into land stewardship, wildlife, programming and the staff who make our mission possible.

Blandford offers an array of memberships suited to students, individuals, families and businesses, as well as reduced rates for those in need of financial assistance and a discount for retired & active members of the military.

Membership benefits:
- Free year-round admission to our center and trails
- A reciprocal membership at participating ANCA Nature Centers (16 in Michigan & 150 nationwide)
- Special pricing for programs & events
- Early and discounted registration for our CSA Farm Share program
- And so much more!

Learn more at BlandfordNatureCenter.org