

CHICAGO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES / PEGGY NOTEBAERT NATURE MUSEUM

Annual Report 2022–2023

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2023



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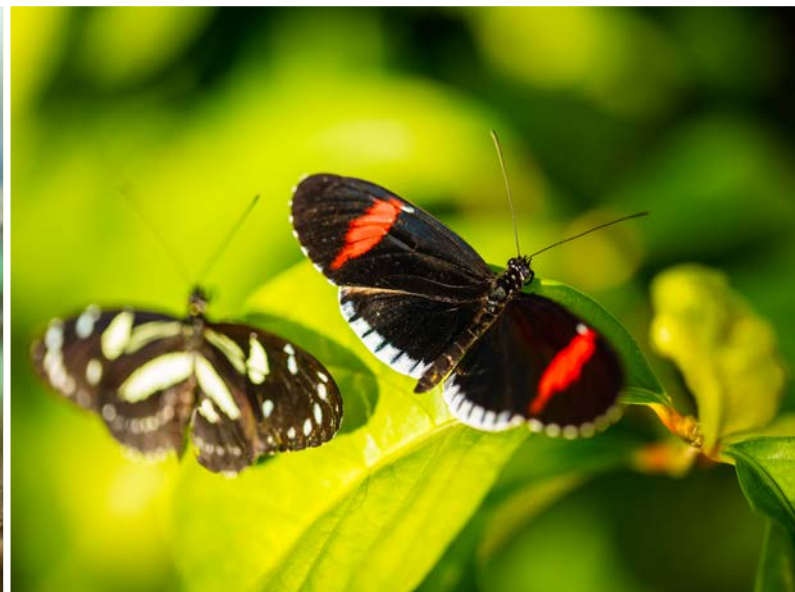
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A letter from our leadership

What another remarkable year of growth and impact for the Nature Museum! I am filled with immense gratitude for the dedication and enthusiasm that each stakeholder has brought to our mission this year. We are driven by our goal to be a beacon of scientific excellence, and had a successful year of fostering positive relationships between people and nature through education, community engagement, and immersive experiences. We truly are a hub of learning and inspiration, sparking wonder for the natural world and activating communities to protect it.

This past year has been particularly memorable as we witnessed the tremendous impact of our exhibits, such as the new *Hawver and Lacy Families Nature's PlaySpace*, fostering meaningful connections between children and their urban environment. I am personally thrilled about the upcoming Sustainability Center, which reflects our commitment to providing essential resources to our community, standing as a testament to the crucial role of sustainability in everything we do.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to David Hackett, our esteemed Board Chair, for his unwavering support and leadership that have been pivotal to the Museum's success this year. I also want to give my warmest congratulations to Dr. Doug Taron, who, after a distinguished career, is embarking on a well-deserved retirement. Doug's dedication to butterfly research and conservation has left an indelible mark on the Museum and the broader scientific community, and we are grateful for his legacy.

We remain steadfast in our vision that everyone deserves access to nature and the transformative power of science and environmental education. The Nature Museum's commitment to schools and to our community is a testament to that vision. Our community's support and generosity have brought us to where we are today, and I am humbled to be part of this awe-inspiring journey. **Here's to more wonder-filled years of nature and science!**

With utmost gratitude and excitement,



Erin Amico
President & CEO



Mission & Vision

The mission of the Nature Museum is to create a positive relationship between people and nature through collaborations, education, research and collections, exhibitions, and public forums to grow our region's urban connection to the world of nature and science.

We believe that nature can and should be accessible to everyone. We envision communities that, in everyday life, connect with, value and embrace nature. We will be a spark that ignites and fosters a sense of wonder for nature, an understanding of science and desire to protect the natural world.

Museum Activities

In FY23, the Nature Museum opened the new *Hawver and Lacy Families Nature PlaySpace*, an interactive permanent experience that connects our youngest guests to nature in new ways. Children up to age 7 can explore a variety of nature-themed sections and stimulate their senses with over 25 fun interactives. Nature's PlaySpace brings six outdoor environments inside the Nature Museum for safe, child-led playtime. Each environment has its own dedicated play space with unique interactives, touchables, playables, and more.

Construction for *The Sustainability Center* has been under way this past year at the Nature Museum and is expected to open in the Fall of 2023. This new, permanent exhibit and resource center will serve as a community hub for guests to discover up-to-date sustainability practices and technologies. Designed for all ages to enjoy, the Sustainability Center will lean on immersive storytelling through continually updated digital content and will feature an open-concept area used for working, reading, and mingling.

The Nature Museum featured its first immersive exhibit during 2023. Based on the groundbreaking book of the same name, *My Journey into the Wilds of Chicago* celebrates the natural wonders of the Chicago region in dramatic fashion. Visitors are immersed in the beauty of Chicago as photographer and author Mike MacDonald ignites a love for nature inside nine chapters of pictures, poetry, and prose. Featuring stunning images from Chicago, this audio and visual spectacle boasts expansive projections that span from the floor to the ceiling. From kaleidoscopic tallgrass prairies to the verdant canopies of rare oak savanna, the whimsical projections of a vast and wild Chicago region will thrill and delight visitors of all ages.

Many exhibits continue to be museum favorites, such as the *Judy Istock Butterfly Haven* (the Museum's internationally renowned signature 2,700-square-foot greenhouse, home to more than 1,000 free-flying butterflies, representing 40 species), *Mysteries of the Marsh* (showcasing the seven types of local wetlands and animals), *Birds of Chicago* (featuring 115 local specimens and the sounds they make), and more. Additionally, multiple exciting temporary exhibits were featured through the museum. These exhibits included *Cultivating The Dutch Tradition In The 21st Century: Jane Jones' Hyperrealist Floral Paintings*, *Natural Consequences: The Geoscience Embroideries of Bonnie Peterson*, *Double Take Photography (Foil Flowers and Currents & Tides)* by David Weinberg, *Without a Trace*, and *The Secret Forest*.



DEAI Initiatives

At the Nature Museum, though we recognize that there is still much work to be done, we remained focused on prioritizing Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) initiatives throughout the organization. This Fiscal Year, the Workplace Climate Team voted to officially rename the group. The working group is now called the DEAI Strategy Team. This change was made in order to adequately reflect the work being done by the group and to ensure that it is understood that the group is working on projects that are not specific to the workplace but to the entire museum as a whole. The team meets weekly to prioritize operational DEAI initiatives, identifying areas of opportunity to continue to more accurately reflect the city of Chicago.

As part of the Nature Museum's DEAI work, the Collections team partnered with Arctos, the museum's digital collections database, to develop a Diversity Committee, which stems from the DEAI work being done at our museum. Additionally, the Collections team worked with Arctos to develop a harmful content statement.

This year, the DEAI Strategy Team launched the Nature Museum's Accessibility App. This app was specifically designed to help those with autism and other sensory needs feel supported and excited to visit our museum, but it is also a great tool to help any family prepare for a wonder-filled visit. This app is equipped with short social narratives for people to learn about our exhibits, the ability to create a schedule to follow while at the museum, tap-to-talk icons for communication, and play Nature Museum matching games. This app is an important step in ensuring all feel comfortable and welcome at the Nature Museum.

The team is taking the necessary steps to creating a land acknowledgement and ensuring it is done properly, so no set timeline for when this will be completed has been established. Additionally, the team is determining how we will celebrate cultural dates/holidays of significance, and additional activities. We acknowledge we have much room for improvement with our DEAI initiatives and actively implement change.

Education Programs

With research and study at the core of the institution's founding, Nature Museum educators provide more contact hours of direct teaching to students than any other museum in Chicago, and the Museum partners with high needs schools across the city. The Education team at the Nature Museum actively works to support and address three key social issues. Research shows that by 2050, 80% of the world's population will live in cities, and the need to foster direct experiences with, and meaningful connections to, nature in urban areas has never been greater. The Nature Museum's educational programming works to increase connections to Urban Nature to form the foundation for a lifetime of conservation values in young people. The second issue is that there is a lack of preparation for STEM teaching in elementary education, which, in turn, results in a lack of confidence and comfort in teaching STEM across elementary educators. Nature Museum programming works to support STEM in elementary education and provide opportunities for educators to strengthen their skills in teaching this crucial subject matter. Lastly, there is a disproportionate exclusion of students of color, students with disabilities, and women in the STEM field. The Nature Museum educational programs are designed to foster belonging in STEM and in museums.

Through in- and out-of-school time opportunities throughout Chicago, museum educators make a lasting impact through whole-child learning approaches that build knowledge, skills, interest, and enthusiasm for STEM topics. Education programs are founded in a student-driven and inquiry-based approach to connect our audiences to interdisciplinary nature and science phenomena.

Program Scope	FY22	FY23
Student Programs:		
Field Trip Workshops (at PNNM)	390 workshops	715 workshops
Camp: Summer	163 campers (hybrid)	316 campers
Camp: Winter	225 campers	324 campers
Nature on the Go (in communities)	129 workshops	68 workshops
After School Science Club	16 schools	10 schools
Overnights	0 events	4 events
Multi-touchpoint School Partnerships with Teacher Professional Development:		
Science on the Go (SOG)	192 classrooms	190 classrooms
Whole School Science Partnership (SSP)	5 schools	4 schools
Urban Nature Partnership	33 classrooms	program on pause
Science Teaching Network	33 teachers	32 teachers
Teens & Young Adults:		
TEENS (After School Matters/USFS)	4 cohorts (75 teens)	5 cohorts (90 teens)
DePaul undergraduate: <i>Environmental Education Theory and Practice</i>	1 quarter-long course	1 quarter-long course
Seasonal Teen/Young Adult Staff	10 staff and interns	20 staff and interns
Community Partnerships:		
Chicago Park District Park Voyagers	Program on pause	11 parks; 165 students
OST Community Partnerships	25 community groups	27 community groups
Illinois Department of Natural Resources ENTICE educator partnership workshops	50 educators	55 educators

Multi-touchpoint ongoing school partnership programs with teacher training and in-school supports:

FY22: 350 teachers, 65 schools, 9,000 students

FY23: 340 teachers, 60 schools, 8,500 students

Field trips education programming:

FY22: 12,000 students

FY23: 21,500 students

Out of school time and community engagement programs:

FY22: 1,200 participants

FY23: 3,200 participants

During the 2022-2023 school year, we continued to partner with hundreds of teachers throughout the Chicago area to provide science educational opportunities for students. The Nature Museum continued our existing relationship with After School Matters with our TEENS (Teenagers Exploring and Explaining Nature and Science) program. In this program, teenagers conduct urban ecology and environmental science investigations, and study the nature found in our city's parks, neighborhoods, and forest preserves. They contribute data to existing local, regional, and global research projects and work in teams to develop their own research questions to investigate. Thanks to the partnership with After School Matters, teens earn \$15.40 an hour in this internship program. TEENS is also generously supported by the US Forest Service – International Programs and the Chicago Learning Exchange. The partnerships that we have developed allow us to bring our educational programming to those who may not have had access to similar programming prior. In FY2023, we were able to offer spots to 90 teens for our TEENS programming compared to 75 teens in FY2022.

Through our School Partnership Programs, Nature Museum educators are able to reach students from across the city and provide them with high quality, educational lessons that are centered around our mission to help create connections to nature. Science on the Go, a Teacher Professional Development program, served 190 classrooms in the 2022-2023 school year. This meant that approximately 5,700 students and 190 teachers received a science and nature based educational program that was designed to help deepen their connection with the environment, and, for teachers, strengthen their confidence and comfortability with teaching science subjects.

Recent feedback from participating teachers included:

"Students in my class are extremely diverse. Between diverse learners with IEPs to first year ELLs students, they have all found a way to obtain the SOG knowledge by hands on activity."

"Students participating in a Nature Museum led program "utilized their background knowledge to formulate a hypothesis at the beginning of each lesson. They made observations and conducted simulations or completed models. They put their ideas together to form a claim that was supported by evidence and reasoning. They made connections between different species as we moved through the unit."

Meaningful and accessible STEM leadership opportunities for high school and college-level girls are challenging to find. Students who are limited by their social, economic, or physical environments during out of school time (summer and winter) are at higher risk for worse academic, health social and emotional, and safety outcomes. Established programs like the Nature Museum's Camp Counselor program encourages girls to explore STEM opportunities and provides structured activities to support developmental needs and positive outcomes. Thanks to a new private foundation partner in FY2023, the Nature Museum was able to develop a robust camp counselor cohort that will have opportunities to explore STEM subjects and get more exposure to the field and career opportunities.



Biology/Conservation/Collections

As of the end of the 2023 fiscal year, Collections staff have added over 2,100 new catalog records since the beginning of the IMLS grant that was awarded for botany cataloging. In total, over 3,900 specimens have been processed (this includes specimens that were assigned catalog numbers prior to the grant period, but were not fully processed, i.e., identified, labeled, and/or integrated). Additionally, 6,300 specimens have been scanned, with over 3,300 images documenting specimens from Illinois. This grant has also provided mentorship to 6 university interns, who have documented their progress through blog posts.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Collections team added two display cases to Nature's PlaySpace that feature mollusks. Additionally, the team relocated Birds of Chicago, which involved removing all birds from the case, completing detailed condition assessments on each collection item, and making repairs as needed. This display case now sits outside the future home of *The Sustainability Center*. Additionally, repairs were made to the American Bison that lives in *Wilderness Walk*, as it was experiencing significant splitting of its hide due to shrinkage of its skin overtime.

Our Biology team welcomed a new Massasauga snake to the museum. The Massasauga is Chicago's only rattlesnake. Relevant staff received a Venomous Snake Training class in order to properly and safely care for this new addition.

For the past 10 years, our scientists have been working to reestablish the Baltimore Checkerspot at Bluff Spring Fen in Elgin, IL. The last sighting of them at this site was in 2013. Our scientists have now seen the first evidence of reestablishment in 2023.

In April 2023, our biology team received a two-year contract for smooth greensnake research with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. This research includes mark-recapture surveys, examination of snake community response to prescribed fire, mowing and hydrologic restoration, snake fungal disease surveillance, and nest monitoring across our various sites. At the beginning of May, the team released seven Lake County headstarts from the 2022 hatchling cohort into our reintroduction site. This cohort will supplement the previous releases of both headstarts and direct-release hatchlings that began in 2020.

The Nature Museum's new ozone research garden has been installed at the northeast corner of the museum's grounds. This is part of a graduate student project with DePaul University's Department of Environmental Science. In this research garden, plants will be monitored for the effects of ozone damage as part of a broader effort by the National Center for Atmospheric Research to both monitor ozone levels and understand how ozone functions in the ground level atmosphere.



C3

The Chicago Conservation Corps (C3) empowers Chicagoans to complete neighborhood sustainability and environmental projects that impact and engage communities across the city. We partner with more than 20 “Green Professors”, experts from organizations such as the Citizens Utility Board, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Chicago, the Friends of the Chicago River, and the Metropolitan Planning Council, who present at the twice-yearly eight-week C3 training classes. After training, C3 Leaders develop and implement their own projects with support and professional guidance from Nature Museum staff. All C3 projects have a measurable environmental impact, educational components, and a community-based team of peers in planning and completing the project.

In response to the pandemic, the Nature Museum shifted C3 leader training classes to a virtual format to account for social distancing and other pandemic related guidelines. As the world reopened, the museum chose to return to an in-person format during the Spring, but kept the Fall session as a virtual event. As a result, we found that there is now a more geographically diverse cohort with this hybrid model, and we plan to continue this format in the future. C3 Leaders completed 17 projects in calendar 2022, reaching 99 project team members and impacting 7,087 community members. In addition to these 17 completed projects, numerous C3 projects started in 2022 (and prior) are continuing in 2023 throughout Chicago, impacting thousands more community members as well.

Additionally, the Guest Experiences and Engagement team has been working closely with McKinsey & Company to discuss and analyze growth potentials for the C3 program. There have been multiple phases completed so far, including surveys and discussions with current C3 participants about what they see as potentials for growth with C3. In partnership with pro-bono support from McKinsey & Company, a report card has been developed to be used with each project to determine who is involved, how many people are impacted, awareness metrics, and to share metrics like feasibility and more.

Attendance and Membership

The Nature Museum has been diligently working to increase attendance in the wake of the pandemic. In FY23, the museum saw a 23% increase in attendance with 105,532 guests coming to the museum vs. 85,942 in FY22. While this is still below the pre-pandemic number of 163,077, we are successfully on track to return to our previous attendance levels. Additionally, FY23 included a 40% increase in paid visitors compared to FY22. Visitor revenue increased by 74% from FY22, and membership revenue increased by 73% from FY22. The Nature Museum marketing team introduced new membership tote bags this year as a benefit for guests who purchase high-tier memberships, specifically the Family and Premier memberships. Membership revenue in FY23 increased from FY22 by 69%, and surpassed FY19 pre-pandemic numbers by 23%.



Marketing Initiatives

In FY23, the Marketing team started a website refresh that included updated fonts and colors, an improved home screen, and updated buttons added to the top of the screen for ease of access for site visitors. As a result, our bounce rate has decreased by over 5%, our user numbers have increased by 21%, and the number of visits has increased by 20%. Additionally, our email strategy has been refreshed.

This year, the Nature Museum, with permission from the Chicago Park District, implemented a price increase on tickets and memberships for the first time in 15 years. This modest increase was a necessary adjustment in order to respond to the rising costs of operations. While we made these changes, we were adamant about retaining Thursday as our free days year-round as we have in the past. This allows for people who may not be able to enjoy the museum at the new prices to still have access to our spaces. Additionally, we are continuing our Blue Star Admissions programming which provides free admission for active-duty service members and their families with ID. Veterans and retired service members with ID can also enjoy free admission year-round. While it was necessary to increase our prices in order to offset rising operational costs, we wanted to ensure we remained as accessible as possible for all of our guests, so these free admission options were retained.

The Nature Museum's Marketing team commissioned a mural for one of the large, main walls in the lobby of the museum. This mural by Ali Cantarella features butterflies that are native to the Chicago area and bright, fun colors. This mural will draw guests in and encourage them to share the pictures they take with it online and reach their own personal audiences, spreading the word about the Nature Museum and bringing in more visitors.

Building Renovations

Presently, the Nature Museum is constructing a new, major exhibit, the Sustainability Center, expected to debut in the Fall of this year. The Sustainability Center will foster dialogue on sustainable living within our natural resources. This significant Nature Museum renovation is a major investment in our space and our community, and we are excited for the richer guest experience it will offer. In addition, the Nature Museum received a State of Illinois Capital grant contract in 2022 for \$750,000 for installation of solar panels and upgrades to the electrical systems throughout the museum. Additionally, through a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Nature Museum completed much needed HVAC Building Control Upgrades. This important work was completed in FY23 and is a great step toward reducing the museum's carbon footprint.



Leadership

In July 2022, Erin Amico became President and CEO following the retirement of Deb Lahey. New leadership provided the opportunity to examine the way things operate and make improvements. Since joining the Nature Museum, Erin has brought tremendous fresh perspective and energy to all areas of operation. One of her immediate challenges to the team is expanding our methodology for determining temporary exhibits and content. Using internal DEAI Strategy Team developed DEAI rubrics, we are re-evaluating who/what/where/when/why/how exhibits will be selected and are actively addressing obstacles to reduce challenges for underserved audiences to participate, such as offering non-traditional visit time options.

In the fall of 2022, Sharon Walton (Vice President of Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer) accepted a position with another nonprofit organization. Chad Coker (formerly Senior Director of Finance & Administration) has been with the Nature Museum for many years and was promoted to Chief Financial Officer. Rusmir Zec joined the organization in April 2023 as Chief Operating Officer. He previously was the Vice President – Finance for Humboldt Park Health and has an extensive history of finance and accounting experience.

After more than 12 years with the Nature Museum, Marc Miller (Vice President of External Affairs and Chief Development and Marketing Officer) retired in December of 2022. Erin Amico, with guidance from the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, made a strategic decision to split this position into fundraising (contributed revenue focus) and marketing (earned revenue focus). Dan Moss, CFRE was promoted to Vice President of Advancement, after two years as Director of Development at the Nature Museum. Dan has more than 20 years of fundraising experience and works closely with Erin and the Board. Sara Persky joined the Nature Museum as Vice President of Marketing. Sara previously was Vice President of Marketing with Venture Endurance, a division of Gannett Media and the largest endurance event company in the US. Prior to this role, her career was with global advertising agencies, focusing on planning and executing marketing strategies.

Board Chair David Hackett's term concluded on June 30, 2023, at the close of the fiscal year. Bob Frentzel has served on the Board for many years and served as Vice Chair, Chair Designate under David Hackett to ensure a seamless transition. Bob began his term as Board Chair on July 1, 2023, and will serve at least two years in this position, with an optional extension.



Financial Stability

The Nature Museum's relationship with its lender, PNC, remains strong. The Nature Museum recently extended its financing agreement with PNC through 2026. As part of this transaction, the Nature Museum made a partial paydown on its debt, reducing its debt balance to \$3.6M. In the continued uncertain environment, one of the Nature Museum's strategies has been to build cash reserves. With careful attention to both rising expenses due to inflation issues and fluctuating contributed revenue due to donor recession concerns, the Nature Museum continues to seek ways to diversify its earned and contributed revenue streams. While the Board originally approved a deficit budget in June 2022 for fiscal year 2023, we believe we successfully achieved a balanced budget by the close of the fiscal year 2023.

The external auditors are currently preparing the 2023 Financial Statements, and these will be posted on our website as soon as the Board of Trustees approves them in October 2023. Additionally, in 2023, the Nature Museum successfully maintained a Platinum Seal of Transparency, the highest level attainable from GuideStar.



Butterfly Ball

Thanks to generous donors, Butterfly Ball 2023 welcomed 488 guests back into our tent for the first time since 2019 after three years of virtual events. 2023's Butterfly Ball was the 25th annual ball and featured special virtual remarks from Dr. Jane Goodall, emceed by Anne Thompson, Chief Environmental Affairs Correspondent at NBC News and longtime friend of the Nature Museum, and two awards. These awards, the Catalyst Award for Leadership in Sustainability and the Leadership in Science and Education Award, were given to ADM and Wintrust respectively in honor of these organizations' important commitment to conservation, education, and the natural world. Additionally, at the ball, Dr. Doug Taron was recognized for his retirement after 25 years of service at the Nature Museum. In honor of his dedication and commitment to the museum, the chrysalis lab housed within the *Judy Istock Butterfly Haven* was renamed the *Dr. Doug Taron Chrysalis Lab*. The 25th Annual Butterfly Ball successfully achieved the net revenue goal of \$1,345,000 in sponsorships, paddle raise contributions, and donations to support the Nature Museum's day to day operations, while significantly reducing event-specific expenses as well.

FY24 Financial Forecast

Fiscal Year 2024 continues to be a year of transition. With new leadership and various foundational investments, including the revamping of the Nature Museum's brand, private events, and more, the Nature Museum is hopeful for increased revenue opportunities beyond fiscal year 2024. With the relaunch of private events, which includes birthday parties, weddings, and other space rentals, the Nature Museum anticipates a new source of revenue. Additionally, the Nature Museum expects continued growth with a full year of price increase for admission and memberships, store optimization, and other organic growth. It is expected that there will be an increase in attendance compared to fiscal year 2023 with the opening of the new permanent exhibit, the Sustainability Center.

We hope to continue to earn the investment of donors to fulfill our mission to create a positive relationship between people and nature through collaborations, education, research and collections, exhibitions, and public forums to grow our region's urban connection to the world of nature and science. Thank you for your partnership and encouragement!

Museum Staff as of 6/30/2023

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Aaron Smith

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Senior Director, Guest Engagement & Experience

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Steven Kramer

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Chief Curator of the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum &

Vice President of Museum Experience

John Aldridge

Spencer Carey

Jonathan Pollack

Tara Preston

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Annual Contributions

ANNUAL FUND SUPPORT

\$100,000+

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\$25,000-\$49,999

John Edelman and Suzanne Krohn

\$10,000-\$24,999

David & Kelly Hackett

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\$1,000-\$9,999

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\$100,000+

Chicago Park District

Micole Foundation

U.S. Forest Service International Division

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Irish Woods Foundation

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Peoples Gas Community Fund at The Chicago Community Trust

Vanderpoel Conservation Foundation

Wrightwood Neighbors Association

Butterfly Ball 2023 Contributions

\$50,000+

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