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A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Past, Present, and Future

It’s easy to be reflective when your organization reaches a milestone. In 1958, Earthplace was born under the name Mid-Fairfield County Youth Museum. Inspired by Westport resident John Ripley Forbes and his goal to have young people become “actively involved in the natural world,” past trustees recognized that modern suburbia was carving up neighborhoods at the expense of native ecosystems and nature playscapes. The need for nature immersion was there from the start, but an early mission statement also included this objective: “Bring together individuals and community resources to discuss, investigate, and solve environmental problems.” Sixty years later, these ideas prove to be prescient and even more relevant today.

In 1998, former preschool student and Junior Staffer, Mark Frey, wrote of Earthplace: “In the cities and suburbs it often requires a drive to find a tree that is part of an ecosystem not designed by human hands.” We are fortunate to have such an oasis still in our midst, and we all can be proud of a community that fosters and strengthens this commitment to open space.

For generations, we have been promoting nature education and environmental responsibility supported by a community that truly cares for both.

Today, time spent in nature is a proven antidote to overscheduled and over stressed lives, and our 62 acre sanctuary continues to be accessed by thousands of local residents each year. Our preschool and summer camp also turn 50 this year and Earthplace has been home to Harbor Watch since 1992—all legacy programs still thriving and growing—but our work is not done.

As you read this, our board and staff are working on the next chapter for Earthplace. Our goal is to ensure that future generations will continue to have access and opportunity to make a connection to the natural world. Mark Frey, and others like him, launched careers in the natural sciences—interests that were sparked by their early experiences at Earthplace. Mark is now a biologist at the National Park Service and works as a Project Director with the U.S. Department of the Interior on the Invasive Species Council. I’m happy to say, his native roots are strong and we at Earthplace share his focus on a sustainable future.

See you on the trails,

Tony McDowell

Nature’s Playground

Construction has begun on the newest playground in town. With special thanks to the Westport Young Women’s League for their generous lead gifts, as well as the thoughtful support of Alison Reilly and local pediatrician Dr. Nikki Gorman, we are excited to offer another way for children to creatively explore the outdoors.

Located in a shady grove, just steps away from our nature trails, the new playground will be open to the public from dawn til dusk, seven days a week.

*Photo is of a comparable project & not the exact planned installation.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

In July, we invited friends, donors, and elected officials to join staff for a far ranging conversation regarding strategic directions for Earthplace. We held four sessions and hosted 25 community members willing to share, not only their connection to Earthplace, but also hopes and dreams for the organization moving forward.

We plan to use the shared insights as we begin to update our strategic plan. What we learned: Earthplace is most highly valued for educating the next generation of environmental stewards, preserving valuable open space in our busy community, and leading the science to protect the quality of Long Island Sound.
THE POWER OF NATURE

On the evening of Thursday, June 28th, the Earthplace grounds were hit by a direct lightning strike, the result of which was two blown electrical boxes, a cracked wall and three water main breaks. We are grateful that no one was hurt and that the presence of the Westport Fire Department allowed us to keep camp open for nearly 100 campers.

AMAZING AND TRUE!

• A lightning bolt is 54,000 degrees Fahrenheit — roughly five times hotter than the surface of the sun!

• An average lightning bolt can release enough energy to operate a 100-watt light bulb for more than three months straight (about 250 kilowatt-hours of energy).

• Lightning flashes more than 3 million times a day worldwide — that’s about 40 times a second. Not all those flashes hit the ground — some happen between or inside clouds.

• When lightning strikes sand or rock, the extreme heat can fuse minerals beneath the surface into a tube called a fulgurite. Though relatively rare, these “lightning fossils” have been found worldwide.

• When lightning strikes the ground it seeks out the shortest route to something with a positive charge, this might be a tree, a tall building or, if they’re very unlucky, a person.

• The study of lightning is known as fulminology.

• Astraphobia is the fear of thunder and lightning.

HARBOR WATCH UPDATE

The Harbor Watch team has had a very busy summer! Our team of six staff and three interns have sampled water from Long Island Sound and 20 local rivers, spending an average of 120 hours per week in the lab together. This summer, they have also been collaborating with 20 other organizations in the area as part of the Unified Water Study to protect Long Island Sound.

All of this hard work has not gone unrecognized! We are excited to announce that Harbor Watch has been selected as a recipient of the Five Star Urban Waters Restoration Grant by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We are proud to be one of only a handful of organizations in New England to receive this grant. These funds will allow the Harbor Watch team to do even more testing in the coming year.

SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT:

Earthplace is incredibly grateful for the generosity of our members, donors, and sponsors who have enabled us to be a valuable resource for nature and environmental education in southern Fairfield County for the past 60 years. One such sponsor is Outdoor Sports Center in Wilton who has made a three-year commitment to support our Harbor Watch program.

A 100% family-owned business for over 50 years, Outdoor Sports Center is committed to promoting a friendly and knowledgeable community of outdoor enthusiasts, to provide only the best gear and service, and to always promote awareness of outdoor resources.

Thank you to the Maxwell family and everyone at Outdoor Sports Center!

EARTHPLACE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Kerry Fitzgerald, Chair | Helen Garten, Vice President | Catherine Talmadge, Vice President
Jeffrey Stefanowicz, Treasurer | Elizabeth Falk, Secretary
Jim Corgel, Nikki Gorman, MD, Brian Lynch, Matt Mandell, Timothy Plunkett, DVM, Lindsay Shurman, Peter Zakowich
At Earthplace we envision a community where conscious regard for the natural world guides individual action.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
Visit earthplace.org for more information for these & other upcoming events

WOODSIDE BASH
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6TH
7PM TO 10PM

Enjoy a beautiful evening under the pines to celebrate our 60th anniversary! Seasonal craft cocktails, guided night walk, harvest dinner, live music, campfire, and open bar round out the night. Help us celebrate the past, present, and future of Earthplace!

EARTHPLACE FESTIVAL
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7TH
10AM TO 3PM

Bring the whole family for a day of nature-based exploration and fun! Rock climbing wall, pumpkin bowling, corn pool, nature arts and crafts, donut on a string, apple sling shot, food trucks, live music, and more!

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING SERIES: THE CLIMATE REALITY PROJECT
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4TH
7PM | FREE

Learn about the Climate Crisis from Dawn Henry, Westport resident & Leader for former US Vice President Al Gore’s Climate Reality Project. Presentation will conclude with suggestions on how to take action both nationally and locally, as well as in your daily life.
**60 YEARS OF EARTHPLACE**

**1958**
**Groundbreaking**

Founded in 1958, Earthplace (formerly The Mid Fairfield County Youth Museum) was one of the first in a nationwide network of over 200 science centers organized by The Natural Science for Youth Foundation established by John Ripley Forbes, a nationally known naturalist and conservationist, as well as a Westport resident.

**1958**
**Early Schematic**

This artistic rendering of the building reflects the mid-century aesthetic of the 1950’s. Lillian Wadsworth, a local resident, donated the original parcel of 10 acres of land with an option to purchase an additional 31 acres. The first Board of Directors, under the leadership of founding President Dr. Andras Laszlo, raised $260,000 for the construction of the museum. The operating budget for the first year was $5,000 – today it is over $2.6 million.

**1961**
**First Logo**

The first logo focused on science, conservation, and natural history.

**1962**
**Leadership**

Mr. Forbes and Mrs. Wadsworth in Sanctuary.

“At a time when more and more of our rural countryside is being uprooted to provide homes and house developments, the Mid-Fairfield County Youth Museum will remain a protected and cherished green oasis, where wild creatures, birds, flowers and trees will remain undisturbed for years to come.” (April. 1959, First Newsletter)

Remarkably, 60 years later, this founding statement remains true.

**1963**
**Junior Staffers**

The Junior Staff program, designed for grades 7 -12, began in the fall of 1960. The early focus on the care of injured wildlife brought in many interested teens. Over 300 students were involved in classes throughout the museum during the inaugural year. The Junior Staff program continues today and has provided foundational training for professional advancement in the field of the natural sciences.
1984
Cole Property Purchased

The Cole Property (8.25 acres) was purchased with fundraising help from Edie Smart and Roy Barnett.

Margaret Barnett (Roy’s widow), Stuart Greenfield and Allen Raymond, early Earthplace champions, pictured at the 2012 Night Out for Nature.

1986
Harbor Watch Founded

Dick Harris, seen here at the helm of the RV Annie, founded the Harbor Watch program in 1986. Through extensive water quality research, testing, and benchmarking, Harbor Watch plays a vital role in the effort to protect and improve the quality of Long Island Sound by surveying the coastal watershed that feeds it. Today, Harbor Watch evaluates 18 species of invertebrates that inhabit the Sound, as well as ensuring safe recreational usage by area residents.

1991
Touch Tank

Harbor Watch volunteers teach students about underwater life and habitat.

1993
Camp Sing Along

Summer Camp accommodates over 100 children a week ranging in age from 2 – 16. With easy access to many acres of unspoiled sanctuary, over 2 miles of hiking trails, a live animal collection, certified teachers working together with camp counselors, the Summer Camp continues to be one of the most popular program offerings at Earthplace.

2004
Earth Day

Every spring, since the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, Earthplace staff and volunteers honor the original vision and emerging consciousness that put environmental concerns front and center for public dialog.