



So much life

**URBAN
ECOLOGY CENTER**



Annual Report
September 2015 - August 2016

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This page: Students with our Neighborhood Environmental Education Project record the bird species they've observed. *Photo: Anna Aragon*

On the cover: Excited summer campers on a field trip to Lake Michigan. *Photo: Maddie Bird*



A Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

When my children were small, they used to laugh when after a meal of spaghetti, I'd announce proudly, "I think that was the best spaghetti I've ever had!" They would happily fall into the trap by exclaiming, "You said that last time Dad!" I'd then chuckle with, "But it's true, each time is better than the last!"

This is how I feel about the Urban Ecology Center's 2015-2016 fiscal year! As you will see in the following pages, this was certainly the best year we have ever had based on so many metrics. We are proud of the growing number of children, adults and families we serve throughout the year and are excited to share the incredible impact that you have created with your support of our mission.

However, we do not do this work for the sake of numbers on a page... we do it for the learning and the curiosity elicited in those who walk through our doors or enter into our parks. We are most proud when we get to see the joy and amazement in the youth we serve: times of awe and wonder. Such a moment was recently captured by Laurel Cutright, one of our Environmental Educators, who took the time to share this story in an all staff email:

Today, my 5th grade class was investigating food chains. As we walked through Washington Park, we spotted a red-tailed hawk, and the kids watched it for over five minutes. We didn't instruct them to be interested or to silently watch, but that's what they did.

As they stood drawing the bird and whispering observations & questions, I told the teacher that I was really impressed by how quiet and engaged they were. She said, "They're a great group. I can tell that they're happy just to be outside."

Suddenly, the hawk silently leapt from the branch. The kids gasped! A rabbit sprang out of the tall grass and bolted away. The hawk swooped down toward it, then quickly banked up and chased it. Both disappeared from sight. After a pause, the spell was broken and the class erupted in excited chatter, laughter and cheering. They had tons of questions about the hawk, and observations and speculations about the rabbit. It was absolutely perfect for learning about food chains, but it was also really cool to see all the knowledge that the kids were gaining just by being outside in the park.

This is urban ecology at its best! The amazing thing is that this took place in one of the most densely populated areas of our entire state. What makes it even more incredible is that this adventure happened thanks to your support! You have provided us with the resources necessary to support our Land Stewardship team who, with our Research and Citizen Science department, have restored this land so that the hawk and the rabbit have the habitat needed to be here. Your support allows our Neighborhood Environmental Education Project to connect urban youth with remarkable experiences in beautiful green spaces.

You see, we too are part of an ecosystem – the Urban Ecology Center ecosystem, where each part is critical to the whole of the organization. You are a crucial link in making it all happen. Thank you!

...and I can't wait 'til next year as it promises to be the best one yet!

Ken Leinbach
Executive Director



NEEP by the Numbers

(Neighborhood Environmental Education Project)

29,081 number of student visits across all three of our Urban Ecology Center branches

53* number of NEEP schools – 28 at Riverside Park, 14 at Washington Park, and 11 in the Menomonee Valley

*Sneak peek! We're excited to share that the total number of NEEP schools has grown to 60 in the 2016-2017 school year!



Birding Breakthroughs

9 species of birds were documented in 2015-2016 for the first time at any of the Center's three branches - American Wigeon, Greater Yellowlegs, Purple Martin, Cerulean Warbler, Common Tern, Forster's Tern, Pileated Woodpecker, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Bank Swallow.



Let's Get Growing!

15,000

number of native shrubs, herbaceous plants, and trees that were planted across all three of our locations by volunteers engaged by our Land Stewardship team!



4,700 Volunteers
24,556 Volunteer Hours
\$552,018 Value of Labor

Many Hands Make Light Work



Letters from Summer Camp

701
47%

campers attended Urban Ecology Center Summer Camps over 7 weeks at all three of our branches.

of those campers received scholarships, helping make summer camp available to everyone!

Go Play Outside!



11,000

pieces of recreation equipment - boats, skis, tents, and more - lent out to our members to help them get out and explore the outdoors!

Fiscal Year 2015-16 Financial Report

Thanks to generous community support and the dedication of volunteers and staff, the Urban Ecology Center ended the 2015-2016 fiscal year in a balanced budget position and replenished reserve funds used in the prior year.

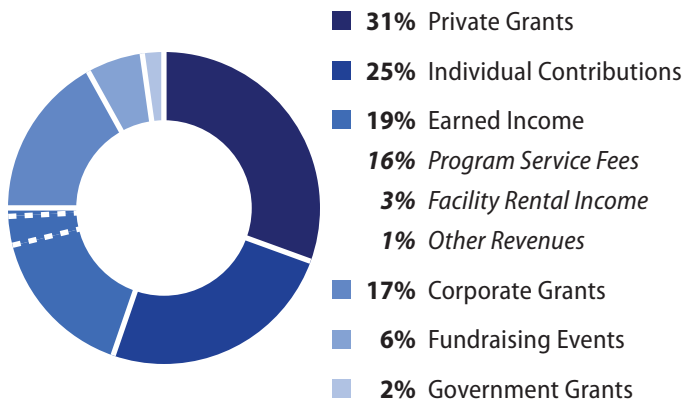
We continued to grow not only the operating reserve, but also added to our building maintenance fund and vehicle reserve fund, which will help with future improvements to the facilities and replacement of the vehicles that are necessary to carry out our mission.

A highlight of the year was establishing The Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum Preservation Fund, an endowment fund created in partnership with the Rotary Club of Milwaukee to perpetually preserve and maintain the Arboretum. In addition, we prepared for expansion of the school program at the Menomonee Valley branch with the purchase of new vehicles and undertook conceptual planning for the future of the Washington Park branch.

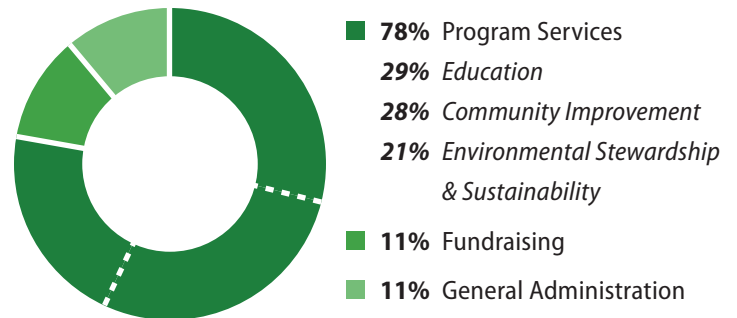
The Urban Ecology Center carries no long-term debt and only enters into agreements that are supported by existing pledges and contributions from our donors. The Board of Directors and Finance Committee maintain a keen focus on the adequacy of cash, while also providing oversight for all material financial aspects of the organization. The Center has a positive ratio of assets to liabilities and a robust donor base, ensuring a solid financial foundation from which to cultivate future growth and sustainability.

Our annual financial statements are audited by the Milwaukee-based accountants of Scribner Cohen & Co. Please visit our website at www.urbanecologycenter.org for additional information including the IRS Form 990.

FY 2015-16 Operating Revenues



FY 2015-16 Operating Expenses

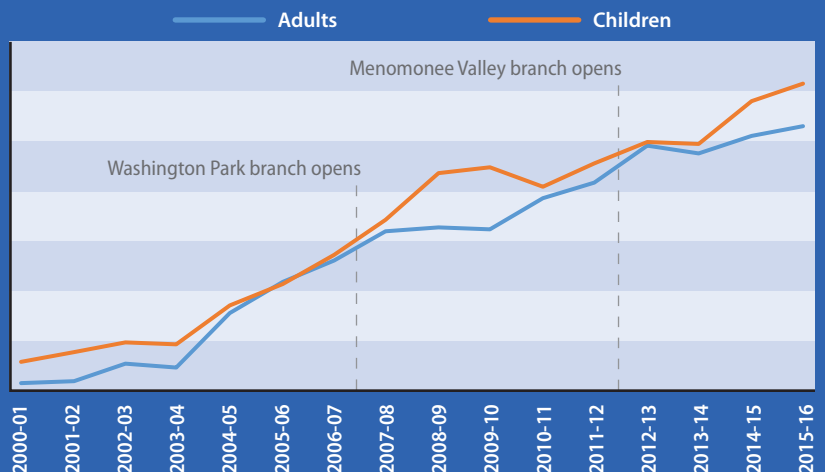


The schedules above represent operational revenue and expenses and are derived from Urban Ecology Center cash-basis financial statements. This statement is not required by Generally Accepted Accounting Principles and is not part of the audited financial statements.

Expanding Our Reach

As the Urban Ecology Center has been welcomed into new neighborhoods over the past 15 years, our organizational reach and community engagement has grown.

Our programs bring children and families into nature and as a result our urban parks are safe, accessible and vibrant, our kids are receiving outdoor science education, our natural areas are being preserved and enhanced, and adults are practicing and modeling environmentally responsible behaviors.



Here's to You

The Urban Ecology Center thanks our generous donors for their support in the 2015 -16 fiscal year.

We are grateful for the support of the following foundations, corporations, and individuals who made a contribution to support our mission, programs, or operations. Donor levels reflect total giving for the year, including gifts-in-kind. The following list includes gifts \$250 or more; a full listing of donors can be found on our website.

Symbols next to a donor's name reflect that either a portion of their gift or their entire gift supported one of the following: the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum (); Riverland Property Acquisition (†); Menomonee Valley – From the Ground Up (‡).*

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Kids at our Menomonee Valley branch designed and constructed a raft as part of our first-ever Engineering Camp.

Gifts in Honor Of

Gifts given September 2015-August 2016 in honor or memory of an individual that are not designated to a specific fund support the Urban Ecology Center's Endowment.

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Lois Wakeman	Donna Ihlenfeld	Papa	Vicki Wachal
		Kerry McCullough	Andrew Connors

**Gifts given September 2015-August 2016 to our Deep Roots or Bench Donation Program offer a unique way to recognize an individual with a tree planting or a bench placed on the land surrounding one of our three branches.*

An artist captures the landscape along the Menomonee River in Three Bridges Park.



Mission Statement

The Urban Ecology Center fosters ecological understanding as inspiration for change, neighborhood by neighborhood.

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