



FRIENDS  
*of*  
WESTCHESTER COUNTY PARKS, INC.

2013 YEAR-END REPORT

*Friends engages the public to advocate for and invest in the preservation, conservation, use, and enjoyment of the 18,000 acres of parks, trails, and open spaces within the Westchester County Parks system.*





IN 2013 FRIENDS OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY PARKS DECIDED TO STRATEGICALLY PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR ORGANIZATION. FRIENDS ENGAGED THE SERVICES OF CONSERVATION IMPACT, A CONSULTING FIRM THAT SPECIALIZES IN NONPROFIT DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, AND SUSTAINABILITY, TO WORK WITH US TO BETTER DEFINE AND SHARPEN THE FOCUS OF WHAT WE ARE AND WHAT WE WANT TO BE. EACH BOARD MEMBER WAS INTERVIEWED BY THE CONSULTANT AND THAT RESEARCH, COMBINED WITH INTERVIEWS OF “OUTSIDE” INDIVIDUALS, WAS PRESENTED TO THE BOARD IN A FULL DAY RETREAT FOR FEEDBACK AND USED TO BUILD A PLAN TO MOVE FRIENDS FORWARD. THE RESULTS ARE OUTLINED BELOW.

### STRATEGIC FOCUS

- **Educate** – Have our marketing and PR function build awareness and appreciation of Westchester County parks and open spaces. Make parks, recreation and open space a TOP priority for Westchester County. (This is something that Parks, Recreation, and Conservation can't do and is critically important.)
- **Engage** – A constituency-building (membership) function to achieve a county-wide, actively engaged constituency. Turn the 75% citizen user approval rating into an active and vocal constituency to protect, use, volunteer for and financially support the park system. Friends must give people a variety of ways to engage and to keep them engaged.
- **Act** – Develop the resources and infrastructure to turn engagement into increased dollars and volunteers.
- **Reposition** – Embrace the advocacy function. Re-message to the values of parks and open spaces to the county. Create Friends' own identity, separate from that of PRC.
- **Redevelop** – Add the staff needed to carry out the core functions. Pro-actively educate and develop a constituency. This requires not only staffing, but active board and volunteer involvement.

“Turn the 75% citizen user approval rating into an active and vocal constituency to protect, use, volunteer for and financially support the park system.”



## **DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

As part of the Strategic and Branding process, several positions were recommended through the implementation plan, particularly a Director of Operations.

Under the direct supervision of the Executive Director, the Director of Operations has broad responsibilities for the development, implementation and oversight of the day-to-day operations of Friends of Westchester County Parks including, but not limited to, Administrative and Management Services, Program and Committee Operations, and Research and Planning. The Director of Operations supervises staff support personnel and various contracted services such as website, grants and marketing.

This position frees the Executive Director to concentrate on policy, outreach and advocacy while overseeing the entire operation. Additional positions were authorized for the 2014 budget to further implement the recommendations of the Strategic and Branding plan.

## **NEW BUSINESS CONNECTIONS**

Initiated in 2013, Friends provides a fee for service to other local recreation and park groups that do not want to go through the expense (which can be significant for a small group) of incorporating or maintaining a 501c3 not-for-profit status on an ongoing basis. Friends provides banking and reporting functions for these groups, which are known as unaffiliated associations. Friends receives a percentage of each dollar managed. There are currently three outside contracts that we have:

- Friends of New Rochelle Parks
- Port Chester Dog Park Group
- Friends of the Riverwalk



## ENDOWMENT

The Executive Committee and Executive Director conducted an analysis of Friends' cash assets, cash flow and rates of return. It was then decided that there were significant assets available to create an investment endowment in keeping with the board's fiduciary responsibilities to maximize and efficiently manage all of the organizations assets.

After reviewing and interviewing several advisors and investment firms, the Executive Committee authorized retaining Jonathan Satovsky Advisors to manage our investments. The original investment portfolio was established with approximately \$1,000,000. The portfolio was initiated in January of 2013.

The portfolio attained a 12.7% rate of return in 2013.

## MOBILE APP

A walk in the park just got a little easier thanks to the first mobile app of its kind for a county park system in the Northeast. Hikers can leave their cumbersome maps in the car and explore the County's 50 parks. Friends of Westchester County Parks announced the launch of the Westchester County Parks Pocket Ranger® app, a free, on-the-go interactive guide for park goers, nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. The new app expands the use of technology to provide information about visitor services and market the park system. Introducing useful technology has been an ongoing initiative of Friends of Parks to improve the parks experience for visitors. Residents and visitors can plan the perfect outdoor trip by searching for a park by GPS location or activity and find nearby locations to enjoy hiking, camping, boating, and all that the park system has to offer.

The Pocket Ranger was made possible by a grant from Fujifilm. "Fujifilm has long been a supporter of Westchester County Parks as part of our global commitment to sustainability and we are constantly seeking ways to be more innovative in our business," said Shig Sano, president, FUJIFILM Holdings America Corporation. "This mobile application project is the perfect blend of innovation and environmental awareness that helps improve the surrounding community in which we work and live."

In addition to state-of-the-art GPS technology, the Pocket Ranger provides numerous other tools to make exploring Westchester's beautiful parks a breeze. Visitors can decide which park to visit using the 3-in-1 Visit search feature, allowing users to search all parks or narrow down by activity or destination type. The Calendar of Events is updated in real time and informs app users of all the upcoming events for each park. Park rules and regulations are a click away, an especially helpful feature to anglers and sportsmen. Planning an extended visit is easy with a few quick clicks to secure overnight reservations. The app also includes a built in compass and a potentially life-saving feature that supplies the user's GPS coordinates to contacts in an emergency. In this case, the user always has a "Friend" with them at the park.



### **FIT-TRAIL AT KENSICO DAM PLAZA**

Friends of Westchester County Parks unveiled a 10-station Fitness Trail at Kensico Dam Plaza in 2013. The trail, which promotes a healthy lifestyle in the community, was made possible by a \$25,000 grant from the Leon Lowenstein Foundation. The 10-station Fit-Trail is an outdoor exercise system installed along the walking or jogging trail and contains instruction signs and exercise equipment designed for the novice or conditioned athlete.

The routines at the stations have been carefully designed to include exercises for: flexibility, cardiovascular conditioning, muscle strength and endurance. By jogging or walking through the system and performing the exercise routine, you are getting a well-balanced conditioning program. Accessibility to free exercise equipment will help residents embrace an active and healthy lifestyle.

### **SOLAR THERMAL AT CROTON POINT PARK**

Friends partnered with Entergy to install Westchester County's first campsite solar thermal hot water system at Croton Point Park. Croton Point Park is a 508-acre park and recreational area situated on a peninsula on the eastern shore of the Hudson River. The campground at Croton Point Park is composed of recreational vehicle sites, tent camping sites and cabins and is heavily used by thousands of visitors from across the Hudson Valley region for 10 months out of the year. The installation of a solar thermal system results in a reduction in the use of fossil fuels to operate the campground facilities, thereby reducing the need for on-site storage of petroleum products to power the existing boilers and heating sources. Through Entergy and an Environmentally Beneficial Project approved by the NYS DEC, a \$100,000 contract was completed providing solar thermal domestic hot water to several washrooms. Two 500 gallon underground oil tanks and one 550 lb. propane tank were permanently removed from Croton Point. This project not only reduces the use of carbon based fuels, it also protects the Hudson River and Croton River from potential contamination and lowers the operating costs for the park forever.

*“Friends announced the launch of the Westchester County Parks Pocket Ranger® app, a free, on-the-go interactive guide for park, nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.”*



### **SAXON WOODS TRAIL STEWARDSHIP GRANT AND PROJECT**

Through a generous grant from Con Edison, Friends initiated a Trail Promotion and Environmental Awareness program. The program is offered free to a culturally diverse population of community residents promoting environmental stewardship of the Trail at Saxon Woods Park. This educational initiative raises community awareness regarding the environmental benefits of the trail system. It also provides visitors to Saxon Woods with a signature logo and clear signage regarding the start and map of trails and color-coded trail markers to keep hikers on the right path. Con Edison is credited as the sole supporter of this Program.

### **HUDSON VALLEY BANK**

For many years, HVB has been a proud supporter of Friends with contributions to the “Fitmobile” program run by PRC. In 2013, HVB redirected their \$10,000 contribution to Camp Morty. Although the camp operates on funds supplied and contracted through Westchester County, Friends does incur overhead and behind the scenes expenses. HVB’s generous donation helps insure that Friends will have the ability to continue to support Camp Morty and its amazing program for underprivileged kids.

### **BEST FRIENDS AWARD RECEPTION**

Held once again at the beautiful Glen Island Harbour Club on April 10, 2013 we celebrated our 9th annual Best Friends Award reception. In honor of the 35th Anniversary of the founding of Friends of Westchester County Parks, we presented our first ever “Lifetime Achievement Award” to Herman Geist, founding member of Friends, for his vision and leadership. 2013 honorees included Sandy Miller, Friends of Parks executive board member and Former Con Edison Director of Public Affairs in Westchester; Michael Romita, Executive Vice President, Castle Oil and Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation board member; Westchester Mountain Bike Association, Tim O’Connell, President; and Ralph Martinelli, Publisher of Westchester Magazine.

These honorees are not only exemplary citizens and humanitarians, but show how vital it is to support our county’s parks and the need for all of us to adopt this cause. None of our efforts would be possible without the continued dedication and generosity of our volunteers and organizations. We can never have too many “friends”.

2013 marked the 35th Anniversary of Friends of Westchester County Parks. Since its inception, Friends of Parks has held close to the notion that merely building a park is insufficient to insure its use; it is critical to provide ongoing support for maintenance, civic improvement and access to nature.



## RESIDENT SURVEY

ETC Institute conducted a reliable and valid Needs Assessment Survey for the Friends of Westchester County Parks for use by Friends in short and long range planning and strategic decision-making.

The Needs Assessment was action-oriented, allowing for a seamless integration into on-going decision making and operations of parks and recreation services. Information from the Needs Assessment allows the Friends of Westchester County Parks to arrive at consensus regarding action strategies based on identified county needs, unmet needs, and priorities and funding source.

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

At the close of 2013, Friends welcomed two new members to our Board of Trustees, John Sullivan and Marlane Amelio. John Sullivan has over 28 years of experience operating his own firm. His work is diversified having designed numerous building types from master planned small and large scale residential developments. Currently, he is the Vice Chairman of the New York State Department of Education Board of Architecture and serves on the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, Licensure Task Force Committee. His firm has been the recipient of 12 Design Awards from the American Institute of Architects, including civic and recognition awards. Marlane Amelio has served as Councilwoman in Harrison since 2011, and has over 20 years of experience working in Westchester County. Currently, she is a liaison for the Harrison Ambulance Corps, Food Pantry and Citizen's Committee for Downtown Revitalization. She also supervises the clinical staff for New York Medicaid Services for SWBOCES (UDO), and sits on the Beautification Committee and International Horse Fund.

This year, we also said goodbye to two long time board members, Tim O'Connell and Sandra Miller. We thank Tim and Sandra for their many years of service and dedication to Friends and wish them all the best in their future endeavors!

“2013 marked the 35th Anniversary of Friends of Westchester County Parks.”



## **MARKETING AND PR**

In 2013 we continued with marketing and PR services, website maintenance and advertising. Although these add costs to our operating budget, we have achieved very prominent visibility in terms of media coverage and effective reach through press events, social media, e-blasts and advertisements.

Friends of Westchester County Parks has grown its social media presence via Twitter and Facebook. We also issued 11 press releases to local and relevant media in the industry, as well as, held five-well attended press conferences announcing the Lowenstein Fit Trail at Kensico Dam Plaza, the new mobile app, Bicycle Sundays, Cultural Heritage Festival series and the Con Edison Trail Kiosk at Saxon Woods. All resulted in TV, online and print news coverage.

Our new-look website is clean and straight to the point. What we do, who we are, and how can you donate are up front and easy to see. We have added links to excellent stories on Friends initiatives, regional impacts and stories that are of interest to our visitors. Use of the website has grown dramatically.

## **CAMP MORTY**

Friends of Westchester County Parks once again operated “Camp Morty,” the sleep-away camp at Sal J. Prezioso Mountain Lakes Park in North Salem. Over \$400,000 was expended to operate and improve Camp Morty, where nearly 300 underprivileged children, who are wards of the county, participated in the six-week program. Kids that visit the camp each summer come from homeless shelters, the foster care system, or are on public assistance. Friends of Westchester County Parks provides an experience that gives these kids a dramatically different outlook on life and an opportunity to spend a week connecting with nature. Additionally, Friends received a grant this year from the St. Faiths Foundation for a “Counselor in Training” program. This was Camp Morty’s seventh year of operation and the staff now includes former campers and CITs who know from personal experience the great value of this wonderful program.

## **BURGER BASH**

In 2013 Friends was the beneficiary of a donation from Westchester Magazine through its annual Wine and Food Weekend. Held at the Kensico Dam Plaza, 1,200 people enjoyed a great event, despite a rainy day! Friends received a \$5,000 donation, plus the proceeds of as many tickets to the event as we could sell. We made nearly \$10,000 in this, our first year of participation. We look forward to being back at the event in 2014!



## **REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES**

Did you know that Americans go through about 2.5 million plastic water bottles an hour and that enough are thrown away each year to circle the Earth FOUR times? In partnership with Club Fit and Westchester County, Friends introduced the “Cleaner Today, Greener Tomorrow” reusable water bottle. Become a “friend” of our parks and get a FREE water bottle while supplies last. Over 200 were also distributed by County Executive Rob Astorino during his State of the County Address.

## **WESTCHESTER CHAPTER OF LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS AWARD**

In November, Friends was honored by the Westchester Chapter of the League of Conservation Voters at the Lodge at Hudson Harbor in Tarrytown. The award honors the NYLCV outstanding partners in the effort to create a more sustainable Westchester and was presented by New York State Parks Commissioner Rose Harvey.

## **PRC ACCREDITATION**

In 2013, the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation was awarded accreditation by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), a distinction held by only 107 park and recreation agencies in the country, and the only one in New York State. Friends of Westchester County Parks proudly funded the application and review process, which included a visit by NRPA members to evaluate our system. Particularly following the cleanup from Hurricane Sandy, this honor stands as a testament to Westchester County’s park system. Friends’ chairperson Elizabeth Bracken-Thompson said: “This award is a reflection of the quality of our parks and the dedication of the PRC staff. Friends of Westchester County Parks is proud to be associated with one of the nation’s most respected parks systems. And Westchester residents are truly fortunate to be the beneficiaries.”

## **WESTCHESTER CONCESSIONS**

In addition to its on-going management of driving ranges at Dunwoodie and Mohansic golf courses, in 2013 Westchester Concessions added beverage, snack and ice cream vending at Kensico Dam Plaza. By aggressively attacking expenses and close monitoring of revenues, Westchester Concessions ended 2013 179% better than 2012!! Revenues were up nearly 12% despite golf rounds at those two courses being down 5.4%. Expenses were down almost 10% as well. Good job! Finally, in addition to paying back \$54,000 on our Friends business loan, Westchester Concessions donated a Gala Bronze Package and made a \$5,000 year end unrestricted donation.



## PARKS IMPROVEMENTS, EQUIPMENT AND PROGRAMS

“*Friends ended 2013 with a net increase of \$77,180 in revenues over expenses (unaudited). This was nearly a 60% increase from 2012!*”

In addition to our many accomplishments of 2013, Friends was proud to sponsor the following programs and purchase of specialized equipment or improvements in our parks:

- Music Fest – In partnership with First Niagara Bank, this event rings in Independence Day at Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla.
- Bicycle Sundays – In partnership with Con Edison, Friends funded this popular county event, which allows for bicyclists, joggers, walkers, scooters and strollers to use the Bronx River Parkway from County Center in White Plains to Scarsdale Road in Yonkers.
- Ethnic and Cultural Heritage Festivals – Friends sponsored the annual Heritage Festival, held at Kensico Dam Plaza. Past events have included celebrations of Asian, Albanian, African-American, Italian, Irish, Polish, Hispanic, Jewish and Indian cultures.
- EagleFest at Croton Point Park – Friends supported the festival that celebrates the over 150 bald eagles that have returned to winter nests along the Hudson River.
- “Goosinator” - Purchase and donation of a mechanical, non-lethal radio controlled vehicle that simulates a Border Collie to control the Canada goose population on County Golf Courses.
- Log Splitter & Trailer - Sal J. Prezioso Mt. Lakes Park benefitted from this equipment, which enables the staff to heat the administration building, reducing expenditures for oil and producing firewood for use by the campers at the park.
- Senasqua Lodge in Croton Point Park - Replacement of the industrial sized stove and oven. Coupled with the park staff’s renovation, the the park now hosts events throughout the entire season.



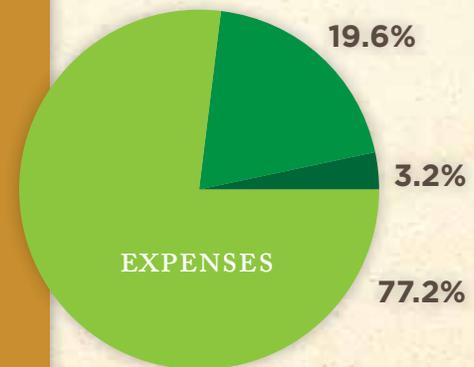
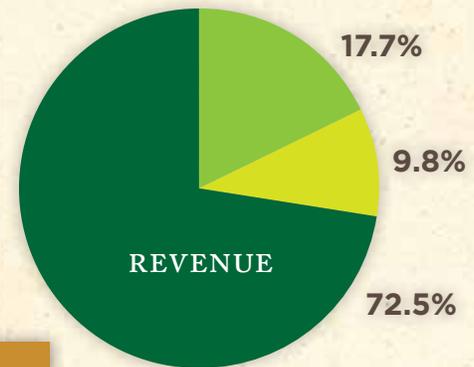
## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Friends continues to support the professional development of PRC management and staff. Professional Development contributes to the high quality of service that PRC staff provide, enabling our park system to be clean, safe and well-managed. Staff provides park visitors with a level of excellence that they have come to expect. Among the development areas that Friends sponsors are:

- A.I.M.S. – Amusement Ride Safety Certifications
- Notary Public
- Certified Pesticide Applicators
- Certified Pool Operators
- PRC Staff “Boot Camp”
- PRC Staff Conference

## FINANCES

Friends ended 2013 with a net increase of \$77,180 in revenues over expenses (unaudited). This was nearly a 60% increase from 2012!



### FINANCIAL DATA

REVENUE: \$1,314,086

GRANTS, SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS: 72.5%

FUNDRAISING: 9.8%

ADMINISTRATION: 17.7%

EXPENDITURES: \$1,236,906

PROGRAM AND FACILITY SUPPORT: 77.2%

ADMINISTRATION: 19.6%

FUNDRAISING: 3.2%



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Thompson & Bender*

### VICE-CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD

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*William Raevis Legends Realty*

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*Oxman Tulis Kirkpatrick  
Whyatt & Geiger*

### SECRETARY

John Kirkpatrick, Esq.  
*Oxman Tulis Kirkpatrick  
Whyatt & Geiger*

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Village of Harrison*

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### LIFE TRUSTEE

Herman Geist, Esq.

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*Commissioner,  
Parks, Recreation & Conservation*

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Joseph A. Stout

### DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

Christine La Porta

### EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Linda Fleischer

### MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Sharon Douglas

\* Marlane Amelio and  
John Sullivan joined  
Friends' board in 2014.



FRIENDS of WESTCHESTER COUNTY PARKS, INC.

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