MISSION STATEMENT

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Grant Highlights

We received several grants from our outstanding corporate partners, including:

» The Entergy Environmental Initiative Fund for $57,875 to convert the office at Croton Point Park entirely to solar power and establish a rain garden in the surrounding area that will reduce wastewater runoff.

» Con Edison’s Trail Promotion and Environmental Awareness for $25,000 to support environmental education and trails at Glen Island Park in New Rochelle.

» Support from Fujifilm for $7,500 and a team of employees beautifying Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla, in honor of the 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony.

» A grant from REI for $5,000 to begin work on the trail at Lenoir Preserve. The connection between Lenoir and the Old Croton Aqueduct is in disrepair and phase I has been completed with plans for phase II in May of 2016.

MEMBERSHIP

Our sustained efforts on membership gave us a second strong year. We ended the year with 644 friends, an increase from last year’s 475 members. While we are happy to have increased our membership base, we feel that the slow pace of membership additions only reinforces the need for our strategic rebranding.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

We began the next phase of our Strategic Plan and the board voted to undertake a Strategic Rebranding initiative, which has begun with a survey of our constituents to better understand how we are perceived in the community. Using these results, we will explore new names, logos, taglines and an overall new look and feel to our organization that we hope will resonate with the public and solidify our position as Westchester’s voice of parks and open space.
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Thanks to a generous grant, we officially launched our in-house Volunteer Program which immediately demonstrated the desire of the public and our local businesses to get involved and help out in our park system. Our organization set an initial goal of 500 volunteers and two projects per month – one Friends-sponsored and one to engage an outside group or corporation for a volunteer day. We are immensely proud to report that we far surpassed these goals with 1,435 volunteers donating more than 5,030 hours of service for an equivalent of $135,164. That’s a 270% return on our donor’s investment!

We are currently working on setting goals for 2016 and organizing our program to further promote our program and get events on the calendar for more publicity to the community.

VOLUNTEER SUMMARY

1,435 Volunteers
5,030 Hours of Service
$135,164 Equivalent Hours

WESTCHESTER CONCESSIONS

Westchester Concessions had one of the best financial years in recent memory, ending the year with a gross profit before overhead charges and taxes of $97,478. This was due to several positive developments. Thanks to the efforts of our Board, the rent charged by Westchester County more realistically reflects a reasonable fee. Additionally, revenues were 14% higher than the previous year and overall expenses were 2.6% lower. This allowed the operation to replenish the range consumables on a regular schedule rather than using outdated, worn or “beyond serviceable condition” equipment. For the first time in recent memory, Friends was able to, in addition to the loan repayment and a charitable donation for the gala, assess a fee for the services that it provides to its subsidiary company. We are looking forward to a successful 2016 and beyond.
Friends kicked off a second successful season of Winter Wonderland on Friday, November 27 with the lighting of the brand new 26-foot Christmas Tree on the main plaza. County Executive Rob Astorino joined Friends Chairperson Joanne Fernandez, Executive Director Joseph A. Stout, the Westchester County Parks Commissioner Kathy O’Connor, County Legislator John Testa, a family from presenting sponsor WMC Health’s Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital and all of our sponsors to light the tree and officially start the program for the hundreds in attendance. Friends is proud to sponsor Winter Wonderland each year, with the event produced by the dedicated staff and administration of the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation.

On the sponsorship front, Friends was excited to announce the addition of two new sponsors, silver event sponsor, Robison Oil and Ice Rink Sponsor, The New York Rangers. The sponsorship of the New York Rangers allowed us to double the size of our skating rink, now called “RangersTown Rink.” Robison Oil and the New York Rangers joined Presenting Sponsor WMC Health, Platinum Sponsors, Con Edison and Party Line Tent Rentals and media sponsors, Westchester Tourism, Journal News Media Group, Cablevision/News 12 and Pamal Broadcasting. Our event saw over 25 million impressions, thanks in large part to our dedicated sponsors.

Feedback from the public was overwhelmingly positive. People appreciated the all-inclusive price, the increased programming and the enhanced visual appeal of the plaza. In all, the event sold over 23,000 tickets and had an overall increase in revenue driven by the changes to the price structure. PR coverage of the event was excellent, with significant interest from local media outside of Westchester, including WCBS TV and a live appearance on the tri-state morning show “Good Day NY.” Winter Wonderland was also mentioned in various print publications, including the New York Times. Coverage of the event helped to drive non-Westchester ticket sales to double from the previous year.

The use and enjoyment of our parks is core to our mission and Winter Wonderland invites people of all ages to enjoy the spectacular beauty of Kensico Dam Plaza during the holidays. Proceeds from this event directly benefit Friends and allow us to serve the park system year round through programming, advocacy and direct support.
BICYCLE SUNDAYS

Friends had another excellent season of Bicycle Sundays in 2015, including the addition of NewYork-Presbyterian who joined our longtime sponsor, Con Edison in supporting this iconic program. The community in Westchester showed strong support for the program again this year, contributing to fundraising, voicing support through social media and showing strong attendance on those Sundays throughout May, June and September. For the first time, Friends was able to add a “bonus” Bicycle Sunday, on October 4th, as a thank you to those that love this program and support it throughout the year. Additionally, we partnered with the Journal News and Westchester Cycle Club to host a bike safety day with bike lessons for kids, safety tips, music and food.

Finally, on top of the amazing generosity of our sponsors and their donation of $40,000 to the program, Friends generated a public awareness mailing, as well as direct advocacy through our staff and volunteers during the program, which raised an additional $9,050.

WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

Friends participated in the Wine & Food Festival for a fourth straight year and became the beneficiary of a portion of proceeds of not only Burger Blast, but the Grand Tasting Village, held for the first time at Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla. The weather was spectacular on both days, and each event attracted thousands of people. This was an excellent opportunity for Friends to showcase our mission to the public and talk to the community directly about what we do, promote membership and provide information about our upcoming events. This year in particular, we converted our tent to “Winter Wonderland in July” and Santa Claus helped us to get people into the spirit of the holidays and feel excited about the upcoming second year of Winter Wonderland. Westchester Magazine generously invited Friends to participate, and together with their donations, we raised over $20,000 to support our mission!

CAMP MORTY

Camp Morty celebrated its 9th season this year, with some exciting news for the camp in the future! The opportunity to renegotiate the terms of our agreement with the County to run Camp Morty presented itself, and we are excited that Friends will take on an increased role at the camp, with a new staff member joining the organization in 2016 to serve as the Camp Registrar. This means that with Friends’ involvement, we can work towards a goal of full enrollment of the camp. This will help us to fulfill our mission by encouraging these groups of children to experience and appreciate the outdoors.

11TH ANNUAL BEST FRIENDS AWARDS GALA

A clear and crisp evening in April made for the perfect backdrop at beautiful Glen Island Harbour Club, located on the grounds of Glen Island Park in New Rochelle. For many years, this has provided the perfect setting for Friends to gather and honor those individuals and organizations that strive to make a difference in advocating and investing in our park system. This year, the honorees were:

» Westchester Medical Center, who received the “2015 Best Friend” award, recognized for their outstanding commitment to the Westchester County park system, in particular their generous support of the first-ever Westchester’s Winter Wonderland.

» REI, this year’s “2015 Best Green Friend” for their growing partnership with Friends and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation, as well as their commitment to stewardship, fitness, outdoor recreation for people of all ages and ongoing support of conservation efforts.

» Robert DelTorto was honored as the “2015 Best Volunteer Friend”. He was recognized for his many years of service to Westchester County Parks and his unwavering dedication to invasive vine cutting which helps to free native trees and increase the health and sustainability of growth.

» The Business Council of Westchester’s Rising Stars Alumni, received “2015 Best Business Friend” award for their relationship with Friends and encouragement of parks and open space as a key reason for businesses and professionals to reside in Westchester County.

Each year, Friends is proud to recognize those that contribute positively to parks and open space in Westchester and 2015’s honorees showcase that commitment. Our organization is immensely grateful to our honorees and supporters, who help us to fulfill our mission each year. We thank them for their unwavering dedication to Friends and to Westchester County Parks.
FRIENDS HAS A NEW VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Friends welcomes longtime Board of Trustees member Seth Mandelbaum as our new Vice Chairperson. Seth is a partner with McCullough, Goldberger & Staudt, LLP in White Plains and was appointed to the Board of Trustees for Friends in 2011. He practices in the areas of land use and environmental law, municipal law and not-for-profit organizations. Mandelbaum is one of only several attorneys in New York to be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional (LEED® AP). Mandelbaum is admitted to the New York State Bar; the Connecticut State Bar; U.S. District Courts for the Southern, Eastern and Northern Districts of New York and the District of Connecticut.

He is a member of the New York State and Westchester County Bar Associations, as well as The Business Council of Westchester. In 2009, he was a recipient of The Business Council of Westchester “Rising Stars - 40 under 40” award. He was appointed as Co-Chair of the Environmental Law Committee of the Westchester County Bar Association in 2012.

Mandelbaum holds a J.D., cum laude and an Environmental Law Certificate from Pace University School of Law, where he was an Articles Editor for the Pace Environmental Law Review; and a B.A. with honors from the University of Florida, where he majored in Environmental Policy. He resides in White Plains with his wife and two daughters.

We thank our outgoing Vice Chairperson, Chris Cawley, for his years of service to Friends and are happy that he will remain a part of our Executive Board.

FINANCES

Friends continues to support the professional development of the management and staff of the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation. Professional Development contributes to the high quality of service that PRC staff provide, enabling our park system to be clean, safe and well-managed. The staff provides park visitors with a level of excellence that they have come to expect. Friends is proud to sponsor PRC Staff “Boot Camp”, Staff Conference and development seminars and conferences throughout the year.

Friends ended 2015 with revenues of $1,519,062 and expenses of $1,830,261 (unaudited). Some capital expenses for Winter Wonderland, program revenue from Winter Wonderland not received until January 2016, and a small decrease in managed funds combined resulted in the stated net loss. Despite this, Friends is pleased to report an increase in program revenue of 17% from the previous year, for a total of $1,386,178, and an increase in membership revenue of 60% to $24,569.

REVENUES

Grants, special programs and projects: 91.2%
Fundraising: 7.3%
Administrative: 1.4%

EXPENDITURES

Program and facility support: 78.6%
Administration: 19.9%
Fundraising: 1.5%
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Board of Trustees News

Friends wishes to thank the following members of our 2015 Board of Trustees, who are not continuing on with us. We cannot support parks and open spaces in Westchester County without the support of our talented and dedicated Board members, and while we are sad to see Talbert Spence and David Swope depart our board, we thank them for their service to Friends and wish them all the best!

Friends of Westchester County Parks
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Christine La Porta

Bookkeeper
Linda Fleischer

Membership Coordinator
Sharon Douglas

Volunteer Coordinator
Sara Cavanaugh

Office Manager/Camp Registrar
Lisa Borducci

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