

# Nature

Fall/Winter 2018-19

# Connect



A Newsletter for Special Friends & Donors of Riverbend Environmental Education Center



# Change is Happening

## Our world faces complex environmental problems.

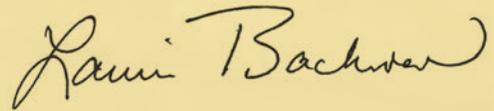
Certainly these problems are far more daunting than in 1974 when Riverbend was founded. Given the challenges we face now, environmental education is a critical resource that provides a platform to effectively engage students in their communities today. The goal is to prepare informed, resilient leaders poised to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

At Riverbend, we work to develop environmental literacy that is grounded in science, using tested educational tools. To advance environmental literacy Riverbend uses nature as the foundation to teach science and environmental principles. These are what we call nature-based STEM programs. Using nature to teach and learn is effective because of its intrinsic value. Nature is something people actually care about and are motivated to explore deeply. Nature provides authentic learning experiences. *Hands-On, Relevant, Real World...* Nature is ALL of these things. When applied to school-based learning, experiences become interdisciplinary and cross-curricular. This level of learning transcends the mere transfer of knowledge; it creates connections between school learning, the community, and the world beyond.

Riverbend's purpose is more urgent than ever. Our overall intention is to motivate and educate students to care for our natural world. We strive to foster an awareness and appreciation of our total environment and to develop the understanding and skills needed to address global challenges. By growing both the love of nature and environmental literacy, we aim to inspire action that contributes to a healthy, civically engaged community. We aim to prepare the resilient leaders needed for tomorrow.



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# A Closer Look

by Erin McCool, Director of Education and Strategic Initiatives



Riverbend strives to teach a new generation of leaders the importance of connection to our natural resources. Our hope is to prepare students to live in harmony with the environment through an understanding of the interdependencies of human systems and ecosystems.

Our approach to environmental education is to use nature as a platform for scientific discovery. STEM -- the intersection between science, technology, engineering and math -- can be explored infinitely on our 30-acre open space preserve, harnessing children's inherent curiosity in the natural world and longing for authentic experiences.

## Let me take you on a journey...

Imagine walking across the preserve here at Riverbend and ducking off the main path to explore a wooded forest. At first, you may notice the size of the trees, the smell of the mulch path and the sounds of birds soaring in the air. When you take a closer look, you may put your hands on the earth and flip over a log to see the microcosm hiding in plain sight. You feel the rush of surprise when a salamander scurries out across your shoe and into the brush. You go a little farther, pick up a piece of spongy log and wonder where it came from. It feels cold and soft and not what you may think a piece of a tree trunk may feel like. You may ask yourself, why is this? **This is where scientific inquiry begins.**

At this point in the story our Riverbend educators shift their role from nature preserve host to "guide on the side," supporting students as they create their own investigations to explore their questions. Educators may ask students to observe the log more closely. Students make close observations about the log including the surrounding conditions and related organisms they find. They may use a field microscope to look closely at the mouthparts of the organisms they see and imagine how this process can take a hardwood log to a spongy soft, decomposed piece of wood. Educators may then layer on information about the nitrogen cycle. Students begin to develop a picture of how nitrogen moves through the ecosystem, beginning with the decomposing organism eating the log, excreting it, and sending nitrogen back to the soil to fertilize the living hardwood trees around them. They may do some Internet research to learn about adaptations and construct theories about how these organisms drive the decomposition of the log.

This is referred to as an **informal learning experience** because it happens outside of the classroom. With underpinnings in

inquiry-based learning, hands-on activities and relevant content, nature-based STEM leverages a student's inherent curiosity of the natural world to build authentic learning experiences. Through this process, students develop critical science skills in observation. They develop questions, collect data and test hypotheses. These experiences help students make connections between different subjects, creating deeper learning and lasting memories.

A study published in the *American Scientist* indicated that just **5% of learning in one's life happens in the formal classroom. This means that an overwhelming 95% of learning happens in informal spaces** such as the workplace, from hearing the evening news and at learning centers such as Riverbend. Informal learning provides experiences for students to find relevance in learning.

Riverbend's programming is essential to developing a student's inherent curiosity and to inspiring lifelong interest in science and the natural world. Riverbend creates an atmosphere where this type of rich, informal education takes place regularly either on site or "on the road" in communities where students have limited access to nature.

Riverbend continuously strives to improve learning experiences by investing time and resources to better programs and create new ones. The world is changing rapidly, and it is essential that schools embrace the flexibility that informal education can provide. It serves to better prepare a new generation of leaders to adapt to and even solve the complex issues they will face in their lifetimes.

## Policy Hearing Held At Riverbend

PA State Representative Mary Jo Daley invited the public to a Policy Committee hearing on environmental education programs. Committee Chairman Mike Sturla and committee members from across the commonwealth heard testimony from state and local environmental experts and discussed environmental education opportunities.

Among the experts who testified were Riverbend's Executive Director, Laurie Bachman and Director of Education & Strategic Initiatives, Erin McCool.



Sec. Cindy Adams Dunn of Pa DCNR, Laurie Bachman and Erin McCool of Riverbend offer testimony at Environmental Policy hearing held in the Snider Barn.



*Farmhouse Exterior Featuring Phase I Updates*



*Teacher Professional Development Training in Renovated Space*

## Farmhouse Restoration: Phase One Complete!

Riverbend is eager to share that the first phase renovation of our historic farmhouse restoration is complete.

**Estimated to be nearly 200 years old, the farmhouse structure enriches the character of the community. Its preservation serves Riverbend's pressing need for additional space.**

The first phase renovation secured the exterior of the farmhouse including a new roof, gutters, drains and masonry work to repair and replace the stone steps and walk. The interior features renovated program space and new electrical, heating and AC systems. Treatment to manage moisture in the building, a renovated utility/storage room, and a new restroom were also part of Phase I.

Teacher professional training workshops, volunteer activities and committee meetings are already taking place in the new space. Additional room allows us to operate more efficiently, making it possible to host activities simultaneously in the Snider Barn.

**Renovation of the farmhouse is a critical component to Riverbend's ongoing sustainability plan. Not only is it an environmentally responsible choice, it honors the history of our site while serving programmatic needs. Featured in the photo top right is a teacher training session held during Riverbend's Summer Science Inquiry Institute.**

Phase II will include the redesign of the top two floors of the farmhouse as an apartment for a future on-site caretaker. An onsite caretaker will help to maintain the four structures on Riverbend's 30-acre preserve and be available to respond to power outages and other emergency situations when business operations are closed. Oversight of our live animals and aquaponics greenhouse make emergencies highly challenging. An onsite caretaker will provide an additional layer of safety and mitigate challenges to perform critical maintenance responsibilities.

***We are grateful to Nick and Dee Adams, the 25th Century Foundation, The McLean Contributionship and Len and Michelle Keating for making the Phase I renovation possible.***



*Danny Rogers at his workplace, Orig3n*

### **From Yogurt Cups to Test Tubes: How One Camper Turned His Love of Adaptations into a STEM Career**

Danny Rogers grew up with a love of animals and science. As a child he spent many summer weeks as a Riverbend camper. He would "stream stomp" with yogurt cups and spend hours outdoors studying nature. **"I became interested in biology because of my Riverbend experiences. Animal adaptation was my favorite theme every year and studying the bodies of animals,"** says Danny. When camp ended, Danny's love of science and the world around him didn't end. His mother Anne says, "Danny was always educating others. On vacation he told people not to disturb the turtles because they might not lay their eggs."

Danny took his Riverbend-acquired fascination with nature to college where he majored in biochemistry at Northeastern University in Boston. He completed internships at Bingham Hospital and Orig3n, a biotech company. Danny works in the area of genetic testing and stem cell research. His future goals include continuing his education and studying the use of T-cells to target specific diseases. When asked if he has any advice for campers with a budding love of science he smiled and says, **"Stay curious. Look at the bigger picture. In nature and science, everything is connected."**

# Strategic Plan Update: Communications



## Welcome to Rhonda Viscusi-Babb, Our New Communications & Marketing Manager

As a part of our strategic plan approved by our Board of Directors in late 2017, Riverbend is focused on establishing a strong public identity.

Last April, Riverbend's Strategic Initiatives Committee, chaired by Board Director Simon Herriott, commissioned the Brownstein Group to prepare and deliver a

brand strategy report. The next step in this process is to create and implement a strategic communications plan for marketing and PR and begin to put this plan into effect across the organization. After expert consultation and budget analysis, a decision was made to bring on a full-time Communications & Marketing Manager to help guide the next steps in this part of the strategic plan.

Rhonda Viscusi-Babb joined Riverbend in September of 2018 after spending 24 years in the trade show and event marketing industry. She has experience in graphic design, brand development, and marketing. Rhonda holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Advertising Illustration from Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia. Her passion to better communicate the importance of caring for our environment led her to seek a Master of Science in Sustainable Design from Philadelphia University (now Jefferson University).

In her new role, Rhonda will be engaged in both strategic and tactical implementation of the communications plan. She will work directly with Riverbend's leadership team to help to further define Riverbend's brand positioning. Rhonda will also create and manage content and key messaging consistent with Riverbend's branding strategy across all channels.



Thanks to the Brownstein Group for sharing extensive talent in the creation of a valuable brand strategy report delivered to Riverbend in 2018.

*Founded at the height of the Creative Revolution, Brownstein Group is the longest-running independent brand communications agency in Philadelphia.*

# Financial Report 2017

## Year Ended December 31, 2017

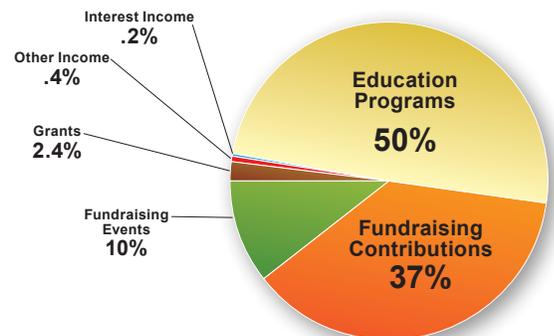
### Statement of Financial Position

Property & Equipment.....	\$1,805,981
Current Assets .....	\$519,014
Other Assets .....	\$7,634
<b>TOTAL Assets .....</b>	<b>\$2,332,629</b>

### Statement of Activities

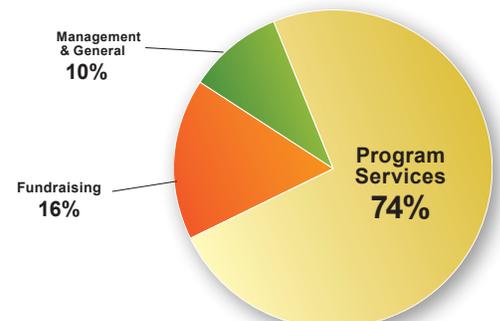
#### Revenues & Other Support

Education Programs.....	\$525,306
Fundraising Contributions .....	\$393,379
Fundraising Events.....	\$111,378
Grants.....	\$21,776
Other Income .....	\$4,584
Interest income.....	\$2,582
<b>TOTAL Revenues &amp; Other Support.....</b>	<b>\$1,059,005</b>



#### Expenses

Program Services .....	\$778,998
Fundraising.....	\$173,989
Management & General .....	\$100,382
<b>TOTAL Expenses .....</b>	<b>\$1,053,369</b>
Change in net assets .....	\$5,636



# 2017 Donors

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\*deceased



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Debbie Benish

## In honor of Ellen Jordan

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