



Friends of Westchester County Parks, Inc.
2010 Year-End Report



The Friends of Westchester County Parks had an active and highly successful year in 2010. In its seventh year since being revitalized, Friends is more valuable than ever to the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation (PRC), to county residents and to the millions of people who use the park system each year.

Under the leadership of chair Elizabeth Bracken-Thompson, the Board of Trustees in its fiduciary role oversaw nearly \$3 million in funds that passed through its various accounts. Friends and its subsidiary corporation, Westchester Concessions, employed almost 120 people, mostly Westchester residents. Combined we paid nearly \$90,000 in federal and state taxes and used over 50 Westchester-based businesses for products and services to support our activities.

In May the Westchester Recreation and Park Society recognized Friends' contributions to Westchester's communities with the 2010 Volunteer Organization award. This was Friends' first major recognition by an outside agency.

The Parks Department's Volunteers in Parks program, another Friends-supported initiative, garnered nearly 30,000 hours of service to the park system valued at approximately \$600,000.

Friends invested in many of the Parks Department's programs and projects, made significant strides in upgrading its

own internal structures, both at the board level with staffing. These upgrades have opened up new avenues to reach out to the public and capture vital donor information to be used for ongoing fundraising and advocacy efforts.

Friends Support of PRC

In 2010 Friends of Westchester County Parks expended nearly \$130,000 in private-sector funding from non-restricted accounts in support of PRC's mission.

- Purchased and donated 12 golf cart utility vehicles distributed throughout the park system.
- Purchased and donated a security camera system for the maintenance yard at Crestwood to help combat a rash of vandalism and thefts.
- Supported the purchase and donation of a new refrigerator at the Playland Amusement administration building to assist the staff with their daily creature comforts.
- Funded essential professional development programs including speakers for the annual staff conference, pesticide licensing and renewals for golf course personnel, certification in amusement park mechanics and operations for key Playland staff, animal husbandry licensing for the farmer at Muscoot and program training for the professional recreation staff.
- Enabled PRC to offer its first ever online training program for seasonal staff at Play-

land through Digital Chalk training software. This saved the department tens of thousands of dollars in payroll costs for training and several thousand more in ongoing instruction.

- Sponsored some of PRC's most visible and popular programs again in 2010. Several thousand people attended the Screening under the Stars movies and almost 15,000 at the July 3rd Music Fest and Fireworks, both at Kensico Dam Plaza, in addition to indoor programs like the Slam Dunk Basketball Tournament and farmers markets at the County Center.
- Became a major sponsor of the Hudson River EagleFest, a large-scale educational program of Teatown Reservation hosted at Croton Point Park. Friends' \$10,000 donation helped bring thousands of people to the park during the "off" season while helping both PRC and Teatown fulfill their respective conservation and educational missions.

One of the most valuable functions that Friends of Westchester County Parks provides is the use of its financial systems for "restricted" donations and accounts. Monies received in those accounts can only be used for specific purposes. Without Friends, many of the accounts or endowments would not exist, or would be in a much more cumbersome place to access for county staff so as to make them undesir-

able for use. In 2010 these restricted funds helped provide programs for thousands of participants. This funding totaled nearly \$2.6 million.

- Camp Morty, the county's sleepaway camp at Sal J. Prezioso Mountain Lakes Park in North Salem hosted nearly 300 children who wards of the county's Department of Social Services. Acting as the grantee for this federal funding, Friends staff operates the program, which comprises aquatics, crafts, counseling, athletics, nature and special events. The staff coordinates contracts for meals, linens, medical services and other important functions. Friends of Westchester County Parks take NO overhead costs out of this funding, so every dollar is used for direct program support. This invaluable program could never operate as a PRC task given the restrictions of government rules. No other not for profit agency would take on this level of programmatic obligations without significant overhead reimbursement. Without Friends, these 300 kids would miss out on what truly is a spectacular, life changing experience for them.
- Friends also manages, again with no fees, the account for the Westchester Cheerleading Festival. This program, over 60 years old had over 50 teams participated in 2010 with more than

5,000 spectators.

- Art in the Parks is a wonderful program that uses Westchester's beautiful parks to showcase local, nationally known and internationally renowned artists. A significant percentage of proceeds from any sales of featured art are given to Friends. This program has funded improvements to the historic main house, which hosts the Gallery in the Park, and to Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. Significantly, this program also brings a new clientele to the park system, many from New York City, who enjoy a day in the "country" and then frequent the local shops and establishments surrounding the parks. Shows in 2010 included Discoveries... Botanical Explorations with drawings and paintings by Katonah artist Corrine Lapin-Cohen; Affinities by Pennsylvania artist David Safhay; and Van Wolf: Studies in Line and Character by Pound Ridge artist Heather Van Wolf, all at the Gallery in the Park.
- Friends manages the Lasdon Glass House Conservatory project fund, which accepts donations to build this unique facility at the county-run arboretum. Friends also manages Lasdon's Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra's summer concert series account, enabling thousands to enjoy world-class music on Lasdon's rolling lawn. Again, all without charging management fees – all proceeds go directly to the project.
- Corporate partner Entergy donated

\$10,000 to begin the replacement of all the trees that surround Kensico Dam Plaza. The current state of these 80-plus year-old trees is very poor, and although many dangerous limbs and trees have been removed, significant work lies ahead. to do. The non-native monoculture that exists today will be replaced by native trees, of varied species, ensuring that generations of Westchester residents will continue to enjoy this spectacular park. Entergy's grant replaced the first 17 trees.

- The largest current project for Friends is the bathhouse rehabilitation project at Kingsland Point Park, transforming this landmark building into the Katherine W. Davis River Center. Through a contract with Scenic Hudson, Friends acts as the agent for the acceptance of donations to make these improvements to a county park and bring a long neglected facility back to use. In 2010 approximately \$1.75 million was spent on construction and management activities.

Internal Initiatives

In 2010 Friends of Westchester County Parks revamped its Board of Trustees by adopting a by-law change that created an Executive Committee to make management of the organization more active and streamlined. The Committee comprises the chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, immediate past chair and two members-at-large ap-

pointed by the chair. This body meets frequently with the Executive Director and report back to the greater board.

Speaking of Executive Director, Friends of Westchester County Parks contracted with its first paid staff in the last quarter of 2010. Due to sharp cuts to the PRC budget, coupled with the loss of 54 staff positions through retirement incentives, the previous unpaid Executive Director (a Parks staff deputy commissioner) would not be able to continue in that role as she was elevated to commissioner. Absent that support from PRC, which has been the standard *modus operandi* for Friends for the past seven years, the Board of Trustees took on the task of developing a job description and contract for a paid Executive Director who is not a county employee. The position was filled in October when the board hired Joseph A. Stout, a highly regarded recreation professional with four decades of experience in the field, including eight years as County Parks Commissioner.

Friends welcomed new Board members Shirley Philips, retired Vice President of Westchester Community College and Executive Director of the College Foundation; Girish Menon of Fujifilm USA; and Harry Horowitz of the Professional Development Center of Westchester Community College.

Friends of Westchester County Parks launched a new and improved Web site,

which was promoted and highlighted by a hugely successful photography contest. Traffic increased greatly each month reaching an average of 84,654 hits in the last quarter of 2010. That equated to 4,105 unique visits over the same period. Clearly people are beginning to notice us!

The Bronx River Reservation Walk audio tour receives an average of five calls per day, with 3.2 visitors listening to five “prompts” or stations for over 11 minutes each day. A total of 1,700 visitors used the system in 2010.

Friends also purchased the license for a software product called E-Tapestry, a donor management solution that allows us to track donations, donors and pertinent information for timely follow up and contact. In spite of a slow start, the last quarter of 2010 saw the use of the database for year-end giving notices, and the continued population of the database with addresses and emails.

Friends jumped into the social networking world by creating a Facebook page to assist with our public outreach. We currently have 133 Friends! The use of Facebook, Twitter and other immensely popular social networks, no longer strictly for teenagers, open up new avenues for marketing Friends initiatives and garnering feedback on the programs and services we support.

Significantly, with all of these changes, Friends of Westchester County Parks has taken the step to separate its internal ad-

ministration and management processes and responsibilities away from total reliance on county personnel. All Friends of Westchester County Parks files are now housed on an independent on-line service called Files Anywhere. The Friends Web site, along with QuickBooks accounting software is now accessed online, no longer through a county server, which hosted both programs in Friends’ formative years. These changes present both challenges and opportunities: Friends has limited staff and is now paying for services that were previously donated by the department under the terms of our license agreement. And while PRC staff will still be called upon to assist, since the success of Friends is in the best interests of the department, the ability to respond is significantly less than it was in the past. The opportunity, however, is that by separating, Friends of Westchester County Parks can become a more independent voice and more aggressive in its outreach if it so chooses.

Fundraising

For the sixth consecutive years Friends of Westchester County Parks recognized leaders in the Park, Recreation and Conservation movement at its annual Celebrate an Evening with Friends. Over \$105,000 was realized after expenses to help pay for the ongoing programs and projects of Friends. The most tickets ever

to the event were sold, 301 and there were 200 plus in attendance April 14 to honor:

Best Friend:

James J. Houlihan
Houlihan Parnes Realty

Best Business Friend:

John Kirkpatrick
Oxman, Tulis, Kirkpatrick et al

Best Green Friend:

Henriette Suhr
Rocky Hills

Volunteer Friend:

Thatcher Drew
Vinecutter.org

PRC Commissioner O'Connor and her sisters, on the death of their father, the legendary and internationally renowned parks and recreation professional Joseph E. Curtis designated the Friends of Westchester County Parks as a recipient for funds in

lieu of flowers. The Joseph E. Curtis Memorial Fund was established and has realized several thousand dollars.

Westchester Concessions, Inc., the for-profit corporation owned by Friends of Westchester County Parks managed four PRC concession contracts, two for golf driving ranges and two for games and apparel at Playland. While not the most lucrative year in its history, Westchester Concessions nonetheless donated \$3,500 to Friends and repaid its loan to us at 4%, so Friends' investment in this business garnered a return of approximately 7% return in 2010.

Looking ahead

In April we will host our seventh annual "An Evening with Friends" at the Glen Island Harbour Club honoring people and businesses that have made significant contributions to

our county. This year's honorees are:

Best Friend:

Thomas Secunda, Bloomberg LP

Business Friend:

Hudson Valley Bank

Green Friend:

Entergy

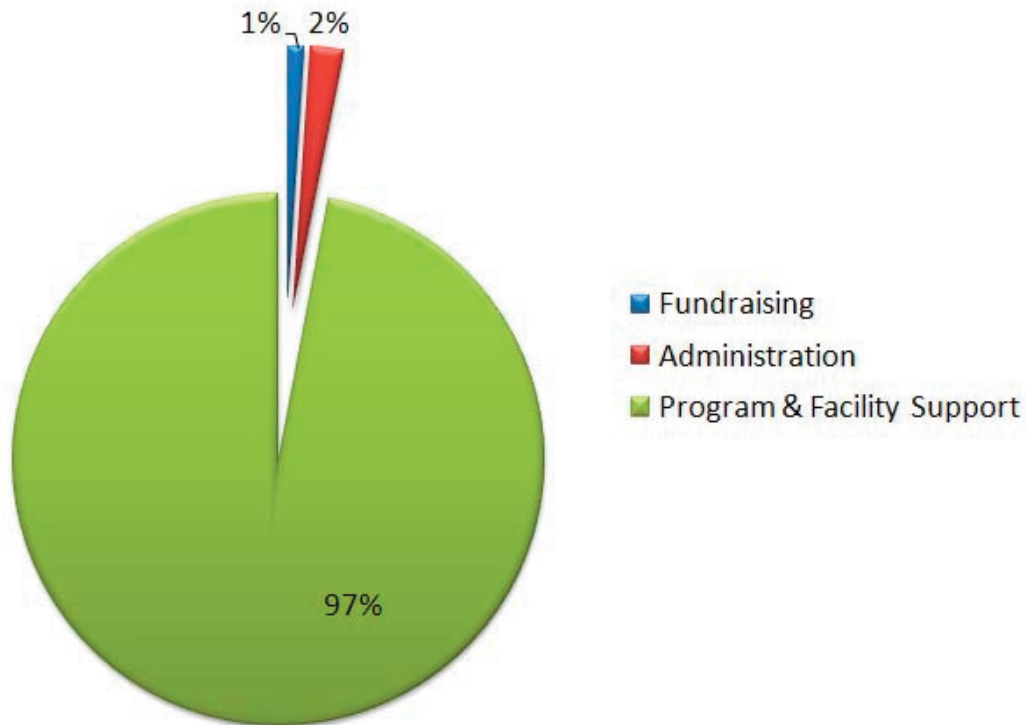
Volunteer Friend:

Miracle League of Westchester

Friends will continue to produce significant accomplishments in 2011. We look forward to the completion of the Katherine W. Davis River Center construction project. We will see the fruits of the restructuring of the board and its outreach activities, and we will continue our investment in our world-class park system, helping to keep it clean, green and growing!

Unaudited

2010 Expenses - \$2,840,031



2010 Revenue - \$2,884,712

