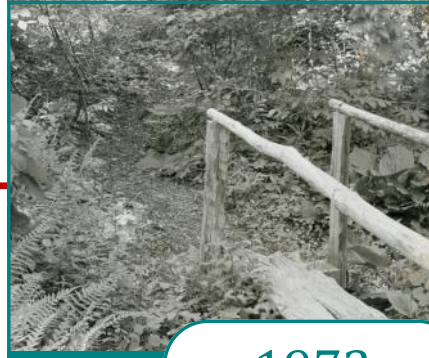


Woodcock Nature Center History



1971

Ridgefield First Selectman **J. Mortimer "Woody" Woodcock** notices that the State of Connecticut is buying large tracts of land for the Norwalk River Flood Control Project. One section contained more than 140 acres and a house on the Ridgefield-Wilton line. Woodcock arranged to have the Town of Ridgefield lease the property at \$1 a year from the state to establish a nature center; one of the few times in Connecticut history that one town leased parkland in another. Today, the Woodcock preserve is 149-acres, which are cared for by Woodcock Nature Center, Inc. (a non-profit organization established on Valentine's Day 1972) through an ongoing lease arrangement with the Town of Ridgefield and the State of Connecticut.



1973

Respected conservationist from Redding, **Gabrielle Ewing** becomes the first part-time director paving the way for future directors and establishing the beginnings of a trail system on the preserve.



1975

Lee McIntire is hired as the first full-time executive director. An English teacher at Ridgefield High School, McIntire saw a newspaper article about the nature center and was determined to put his deep love of the natural world to work. He was driven by a desire to not only maintain the natural environment but by an opportunity to encourage outdoor education among inner city youth.

McIntire begins a summer camp and runs a variety of year-round programs including cross-county skiing and ice skating events to birding opportunities, trailside botany and nature arts and crafts.



1978

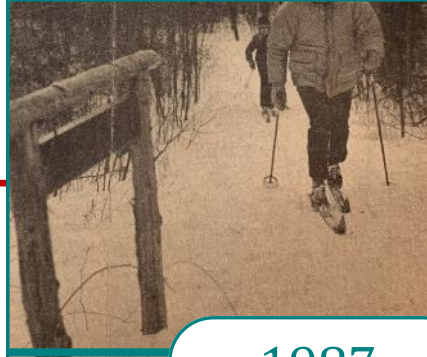
A certificate of occupancy and permit are secured to move the residential house originally located at **54 Deer Run** down the long driveway to its current location. It was a residence for Lee McIntire and his family throughout his tenure as executive director. The house is eventually converted into administrative offices for the growing nature center staff.

Woodcock Nature Center History



1986

Under leadership of **Presidents Robert and Kay Miller** along with director Lee McIntire and his wife Kay (pictured), the organization uses it's first decade to begin to find the right mix of donors and fundraising events. The team experimented with ideas such as seasonal sales of bird seed, Christmas trees and wreaths, to support a growing array of programs including canoeing and hiking trips for youth, a winter festival and summer camps, nature walks and wildlife talks.



1987

The **trail system** was expanded to include several new routes, some named after nature center supporters as a way to encourage large donations. A dock was built on the pond, as was a long boardwalk into the wetlands. Year-round activities begin to be held on the preserve. By this time, Woodcock boasts nearly 100 members and a **revenue budget of \$25,500.**



1988

In February, **Robert Ayotte** starts as the next Executive Director. Full of ambition, he runs 29 programs in his first two months! Under Ayotte's leadership an after-school Junior Naturalist program begins (pictured) and the first birthday party programs are held towards the end of the year.



1990

Woodcock board member **Alice Wohlberg** enlists fellow members of the Wilton Garden Club to help decorate wreaths to sell for the benefit of nature center programs. Prices range from \$9 for a plain 10-inch wreath to \$34 for the decorated 18-inch

Robert Ayotte steps down and **Margaret Peterson** takes the helm at Woodcock.

Peterson spearheads, **Mission: Wolf**, an education program held at Middlebrook School in Wilton that benefits Woodcock and the Mission: Wolf sanctuary in Colorado. This marks the beginning of many years of wolf-focused programming along with local partners at the nature

Woodcock Nature Center History

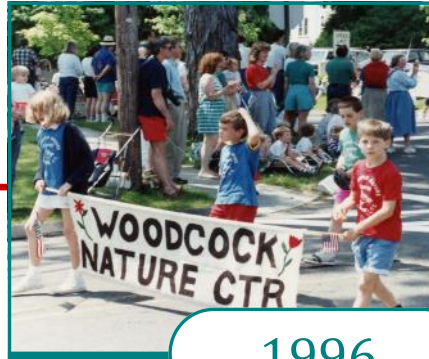


1995

Woodcock sponsors the first official **Earth Day road race** for 100 runners. The 4.5 mile race began at the corner of Fawn Place and Deer Run Road in Wilton. The day also included a 2.5 mile walk as well as a 1 mile family “scamper”. Top prizes were awarded to runners as well as top dog finishers!

The event culminated in an Earth Day festival at Woodcock with a treasure hunt, food, and nature activities.

The tradition of an annual race and celebration continues at Woodcock to this day.

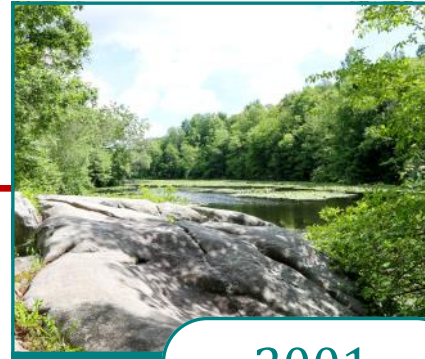


1996

Despite having nearly 400 members and the success of inventive community programs such as “Roots and Shoots” and “Feathered Globetrotters” sponsored by the Jane Goodall Institute, a downward trend in income threatens the survival of Woodcock Nature Center.

Steven Sweeney becomes Board president and **John McLeran and Penny Frost** take over as co-executive Directors determined to keep things afloat.

By this time the Woodcock revenue budget has grown to approximately \$130,000.



2001

After successfully shepherding Woodcock through tumultuous times, Steven Sweeney steps down as president. The Woodcock Board makes a resolution to name “**Sweeney Rock**” (pictured), an iconic shelf of granite behind the nature center building, after Sweeney and in honor of his leadership through rocky financial times.

Woodcock survives this rough period by cutting expenses, strategically reducing programs, and revitalizing the membership program.



2003

Woodcock’s collection of **teaching animals** continues to grow. Aviary residents include red-tailed hawk Seneca, barred owls Click and Clack, Hooty the great horned owl and two resident crows.

Woodcock establishes a **Ridgefield High School** senior internship program which continues to this day.

By the end of this year 5000 children attended onsite field trips and 500 local kids were participating in the summer Junior Naturalist Outdoor Adventure Camp.

Woodcock Nature Center History



2006

Work begins on a **teaching pavilion** and on Earth Day 2007 the pavilion is completed and dedicated to the handful of individuals who made it's construction possible, including Jeff Lapnow and Bolton Landscaping, board member Rich Vail, Yankee Doodle Stove, Old Mill Builders, among others.

Woodcock grows to include three full time staff under Executive Director **Henryk Teraszkiewicz** (who began in 2005). He would continue to grow Woodcock's educational programming and infrastructure for the next decade.



2008

Summer camp receives an official license from the State of Connecticut; lending additional credibility and support to an already robust program.

Wreath Festival sells out for the first time. The event quickly grows to serve 1,000 decorators over a two week period each December, raising more than \$80,000 for Woodcock's education programs annually.



2009

Purple trail is blazed with help from Girl Scout Gabby Wang and a bridge is constructed over the wetlands by Eagle Scout Colin Kennedy of Wilton Troop 125.

In only 8 years, Woodcock has increased programming from 22 school classes per year to 222, grown the summer camp from 275 children to 575 while continuing to offer high quality scout programs, afterschool enrichment, public programs, birthday parties, and a wide range of volunteer opportunities.

By this time the Woodcock revenue budget has grown to approximately \$285,000.



2011

Girl and Boy Scouts have made a crucial impact on the development of Woodcock's grounds and on-site educational components over the years.

Pictured above is the construction of the yellow boardwalk by an Eagle Scout. Additional scout projects around this time in Woodcock's history include a kiosk at the Gilly Lane trail entrance, picnic tables, benches, a compost bin and canoe shed, trail signage, a firewood shed and an open space enclosure for Woodcock's teaching animals.

Woodcock Nature Center History



2013

The program staff continues to grow to include many familiar faces still at Woodcock today: **Sarah Breznen, Jennifer Bradshaw and Jeanne Young!**

The animal team has grown to include nearly 30 reptiles and amphibians along with Hooty the great horned owl, Click the barred owl and a red-tailed hawk named Dakota.

Woodcock's iconic playground grows in popularity. Scouts create a spider web apparatus which exists to this day. The preserve, trails and playground continue to be open to the public dawn to dusk daily.



2016

The **Anne S. Richardson Fund** supports the execution of a land survey on the Woodcock preserve which is necessary for the renewal of the long-term land lease with the State of Connecticut and Town of Ridgefield. Ongoing donations from the Richardson Fund subsequently support building and grounds upgrades seen through 2019.

Michael Rubbo becomes executive director and spearheads a strategic plan for Woodcock with support from the **Harvard Business School Community Partners Program** (the first in Woodcock's history.)



2017

A pollinator garden is constructed with support from the Ronald McDonald House Charities. Mike Rubbo and volunteers at Woodcock help to develop the **Northeast Pollinator Pathway** organization along with the Norwalk River Watershed Association, Wilton Land Trust, Wilton and Ridgefield Garden Clubs and Ridgefield Conservation Commission; establishing pollinator-friendly habitats and food sources for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinating wildlife.

Mommy & Me and the Natural World begins, launching a comprehensive and wildly popular preschool program that will come to include *Free Play* and *Into the Forest*, encouraging a new generation of nature lovers at the nature center.



2018

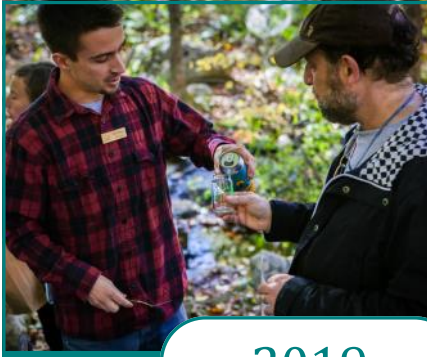
Lenore Eggleston-Herbst begins as Executive Director and is tasked with growing Woodcock's fundraising, special events and infrastructure.

A major gift from the **Oaklawn Foundation** supports ongoing scholarships for camp, afterschool and preschool programs.

A huge white pine branch destroys a portion of the playground fence and jump starts a campaign to re-design Woodcock's play space. Chris Gray of Graywoods Designs envisions a new custom-built structure which includes a climbing platform and natural play elements made from materials collected on the preserve.

A gift from the **Robert F. Schumann Foundation** reignites outreach programming utilizing Woodcock's birds of prey.

Woodcock Nature Center History



2019

Woodcock hosts the first **Frothy Forage**, welcoming families for soda and beer tasting plus educational encounters along the trails. By 2022, the event, which partners with Nod Hill Brewery in Ridgefield, nearly triples in attendance. Fundraising events become a cornerstone fundraising and community building opportunity.

Fairfield County Bank, having been a supporter since the earliest days of Woodcock, nearly doubles their support helping to expand outreach field trip programs and deepening support across all at Woodcock endeavors.



2020

Strategic decision-making by a creative and determined staff and board are the key to Woodcock's survival during the challenging **COVID-19** pandemic. Visitors flock to use trail system and grounds.

The Center experiences significant revenue loss and nearly \$8,000 in unexpected COVID-19-related expenses. The nature center perseveres due to deep support from the community, private foundations and local businesses.

The SBA's Payroll Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster loans help to bolster the bottom line. Numerous virtual fundraising campaigns and in-person events solidify Woodcock's sense of community and purpose.



2021

Woodcock's budget has now grown from \$120,000 to \$545,000 in ten years. The staff grows again around this time to include four full time environmental educators and almost ten year-round, part time staff and educators

Eagle Scout Jared Hogan builds a teaching structure at the southern end of the preserve, allowing for expanded programming in the farthest reaches of the nature center.

The **purple bridge** is re-constructed again at this time with support from Rings End and the Campbell Family.



2022

Over 500 summer campers register within 48 hours; selling out Woodcock's popular camp.

Woodcock honors **50 years** with additional celebrations, fundraising, stories, reunions and perhaps most impactfully, a strategic re-imagining of its visual identity.