



## dear 2040

### WRITERS IMAGINE THE FUTURE

*Edited by Anna Lehr Mueser, Public Relations Manager*

**OVER THE SUMMER** the Schuylkill Center reached out to 100 environmental thinkers, non-profit and civic leaders, artists, and academics, inviting them to write a letter to the year 2040. What will the global environment look like in 25 years? How will Philadelphia be, environmentally? We'll be placing their full letters in our time capsule, but below are gathered excerpts from these letters. Enjoy!

**WELCOME TO THE YEAR 2040.** Back in 1965, our air, land and water were much more polluted than today. We took steps both locally and as a nation to protect, improve and enhance those resources; by 2040 I expect our environment will be cleaner still. While we have lost a great deal of land and habitat to development since 1965 – and I expect we will lose still more by 2040 – we have also learned a great deal about the interrelationships among species, the importance of diversity, and what it takes to manage our environment and coexist in this world. I hope that the landscapes of 2040 are still healthy and thriving, and that you have successfully addressed the environmental challenges of 2015, including the threat of

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climate change.

*Barry Seymour, Executive Director,  
Delaware Valley Regional Planning  
Commission*

**MY HOPE** is that you are reading this letter in a world where humans have learned to live at peace with each other and with nature, to cooperate and share with respect for all life. When I go into the woods and meadows, I look with awe at the beauty of

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WE HAVE LEARNED A GREAT DEAL ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES TO MANAGE OUR ENVIRONMENT AND COEXIST IN THIS WORLD



ASH TREES ARE CURRENTLY UNDER THREAT FROM THE EMERALD ASH BORER, A SMALL BEETLE MAKING ITS WAY ACROSS THE REGION. WILL THERE STILL BE ASH TREES IN 2040?

50 YEARS  OF PEOPLE + NATURE

**50** The Schuylkill Center



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# director's cut

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**SO IT'S 2040, YOU ARE DIRECTING THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER**, and the Center is, amazingly, celebrating 75 years of groundbreaking work. Congratulations! Back here in 2015, our staff is busily trying to answer a very important question: what should a 21st century environmental education center do or be?

So what kinds of programming do we offer? What should our exhibits look like? How do technology and the Internet inform programming? How do we retain the biological diversity that inhabits our living ark? As the Philadelphia public school system continues its slow-motion implosion, how do we engage urban low-income youth in life-changing programming?

And just after the hottest July ever, can a nature center address the climate we see changing before us? As I write, the 2016 presidential campaign is heating up—did Donald Trump win?—but I am wondering when climate change finally became a centerpiece issue in a campaign. Not 2016. But it will, without question, and you'll know when it happened.

This has been a big summer here: we've finished replacing heating and air conditioning in half the building. We're also beginning campaigns to upgrade our facilities and land. How did we do?

Nature Preschool is opening its third classroom in three years, and I'm hoping that in 2040 graduates of this program are coming back to open the time capsule. Monkey Tail Gang afterschool kids and Summer Camp veterans may return as well—maybe we are even enrolling second generation Nature Preschool kids. That would be wonderful.

We're starting a Nature Rx program where pediatricians prescribe outdoor play time to kids suffering from a range of ills—did our new advocacy for direct contact in nature make a difference?

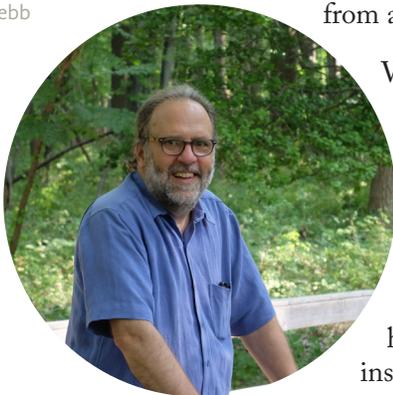
We sponsor the nation's most ambitious environmental art program; can't wait to see how this evolves. We've got one of the few wildlife clinics left in the Delaware Valley, and hope that is still making its extraordinary impact. We guess that when you stand in our forest, 80% of the living things you see are invasives like stilt grass and devil's walking stick; did that paradigm shift?

We're printing my letter to you in our newsletter delivered via US mail to our members. I'm guessing in 2040 you're not printing newsletters anymore, but I'm hoping you still have members—and lots of them. Mostly, you are directing one of the most important institutions in the region, one with an extraordinary staff doing remarkable work: connecting people with nature. I hope you treasure every moment of it.

As people live longer, I'm hoping to come back and help you open the time capsule; I'll be that hopefully spry octogenarian beaming wildly.

All the best,

Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director, [mike@schuykillcenter.org](mailto:mike@schuykillcenter.org)



# naturalist's notebook

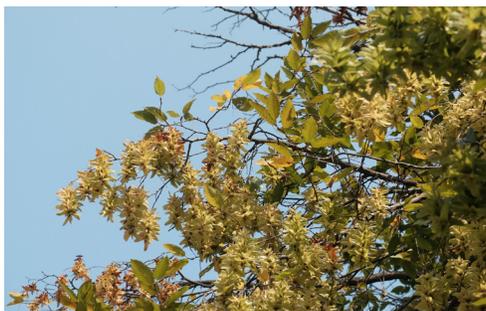
## IF TREES COULD TALK

By Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director

**"I GET COMFORTED AROUND TREES,"** noted our still-new Director of Land and Facilities Steve Goin, who started here only this past winter. Good thing, too, because Steve is caretaker, with his staff, of 340 acres of tulip trees, sassafras, maples and more.

And some of that comfort can rub off on you. In September's University of Nature, our day-long adult learning experience featuring numerous workshops on a variety of natural history and science topics, Steve will be offering the workshop "If Trees Could Talk." As a certified arborist with more than a decade in the tree industry caring for, pruning, growing, and, sadly, even removing trees, Steve has listened to a lot of trees talk.

"Like the awesome hornbeams by the na-



ture center's front entrance that are in so much trouble," he said. Standing right alongside our driveway, Steve pointed out the dead branches at the top of one and the large number of seeds being produced at its lower branches. He described their history of "50 years of cars running over their roots," compacting the soil and starving the roots of oxygen. If they could talk, they would tell us they are on their way out.

Across the driveway stands a beautiful pair of red oaks, one with green leaves, the other with browning leaves starting to fall. "It's important to note what a healthy tree looks like, see how a species is supposed to grow. If you see that tree with scorched leaves by itself, you might think oaks are supposed to turn brown in September.

But seeing the other for comparison, you know something is wrong."

The workshop begins with Steve sharing cross-sections and trunks of trees to dive into their stories, then heading out into the forest to meet some classic trees and see what other stories they tell. Some of the stories will be happy ones!

And yes, Steve has a favorite tree. "I'm partial to swamp white oaks. They have a big, spreading, wide canopy, are hardy, grow in lots of conditions, even dry soil, and are a great resource in the woods. They are a noble tree."

Join us at the University of Nature and let Steve share more tree stories with you. ➤

### coming up:

UNIVERSITY OF NATURE  
Saturday, September 19  
Enjoy a day of in-depth learning.

# art & climate change

## WEST PHILLY STUDENTS EXPLORE STORMWATER

By Christina Catanese, Director of Environmental Art and Camila Rivera-Tinsley, Manager of School Programs

**IT STARTED AS MANY COLLABORATIONS** do, over lunch with the phrase, "this might be a crazy idea, but..."

Educators from the Schuylkill Center, Philadelphia Water, Mill Creek Farm,

and Overbrook Art and Environmental Education Center had just participated in a workshop offered by the Franklin Institute's Climate & Urban Systems Partnership (CUSP) on the latest strategies for engagement around climate change, and

we were fired up. CUSP gathers educators, climate scientists, and community organizations to strategize, share ideas, and offer peer mentorship to develop ways

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this world. It's my love for nature, for animals, for my children that give me the will to change my life and work for a sustainable future. The work of planet-saving will likely not be finished by 2040, but I hope by then that you humans of the future will have found our place on this planet, not as exploiters, but as lovers of life. And live with great joy in your hearts.

*Judy Wicks, Founder, White Dog Café*

**YOUR GENERATION** probably wonders why we didn't do something. Well we tried. In 2013 an organization called 350.org drew 40,000 protesters to the White House to prevent Canada's Keystone XL Pipeline from piping oil to a refinery in Texas. As of today, there is no pipeline. In 2014 over 400,000 protesters marched in Manhattan to stop climate change. This year President Obama issued an executive order to cut carbon emissions with his Clean Power Plan and Pope Francis announced in his Encyclical that climate change is real and is the most serious threat to humanity.

We in the environmental movement won't give up in spite of the formidable opposition. In fact, we plan to push much harder because the stakes are direr. Here at the fulcrum between yesterday and the unforeseeable future when you read this, you'll judge how well we did.

*Richard Whiteford, writer and activist*



JUDY WICKS, FOUNDER OF THE WHITE DOG CAFE

**I HAVE TO BELIEVE** in the affirmative - that my artistic practice - creating meaningful compelling imagery at the intersection of Art and Science will succeed as an antidote to doubt. My expeditions to the polar regions to bear witness to the melting of glaciers in our world serve to inform my practice as well as to communicate the scientific facts to a range of audiences.

*Diane Burko, artist*

**SO NOW, 2040**, tell me about my River. Is it healthy? Is it still free-flowing? Do all its waters support all life stages for fish populations? Has our unique population of Atlantic sturgeon rebounded? Do we once again have a vital horseshoe crab population in the Bay? Do red knots once again fill the skies over the Delaware during spring migrations? If these things have not come to pass, come find me. If there is still work to be done, I can guarantee you I am still out there, speaking for the River because a river can't defend itself.

*Maya van Rossum, Delaware Riverkeeper*

**THIS TIME CAPSULE** is being placed in a remnant of nature: a metro-forest; the green fringe of the megalopolis, protected for me and now for you by forethought and a sense of the preciousness of nature. I want to think that you will be living in a world that promotes nature to thrive in between the cracks of the built environment. I want to imagine that my old



RICHARD WHITEFORD AT THE UN, 2012.



MAYA VAN ROSSUM, DELAWARE RIVERKEEPER

parking lots are now your meadows and wetlands. I want to think that the new structures will participate more fully in the natural processes at work on the site. I hope that you can sense the weather, the rainfall, the temperature, within a building; that the outdoor world is interacting with the indoor world. I want your life in the city to be less removed from nature, and more part of nature.

We always think that the future will be full of change but I am struck by how similar the future is to the past. Forms of communication change as well as methods of transportation and hairstyles. But the human need to interact with nature is a constant: our human desire for nature has remained unchanged throughout history. This place, this green jewel breathing oxygen for us, holds a kind of peace that cannot be replicated with the human hand. My greatest hope is that you can feel the interconnectivity of this biome, see your place in the complex web ... and feel at home in the world.

*Stacy Levy, environmental artist*

Hear more letters at the **Jubilee in the Grove** on October 10 when we dedicate Jubilee Grove. ✈

# the wild side

## BARN SWALLOWS ON THE WING

By Anna Lehr Mueser, Public Relations Manager

**THIS SUMMER** our wildlife clinic enjoyed treating a number of young barn swallows. These graceful birds, iridescent blue on their backs and wings, live almost their entire lives on the wing, explains wildlife rehabilitator Michele Wellard. Once released, the barn

swallows in the clinic's care will take to the skies, landing only in their nests. Several groups of baby barn swallows were brought into the wildlife clinic on July 31, likely from several nests. The babies had fallen from the nest and the people who brought them in

explained that they were unable to reach the nest (high in a barn) to return them. The swallow you see here has damage to his left wing (see center right photo). While the siblings and foster siblings with whom this swallow was cared for at the clinic were released

at the end of August, this one isn't ready to fly yet. Without his flight, this swallow won't be able to live in the wild, so we're keeping him until his wing feathers grow back. ✈

MORE ABOUT OUR BARN SWALLOWS AND A VIDEO OF THEM BEING RELEASED ON OUR BLOG.



# 10<sup>th</sup> annual meigs award

## BOB MERCER EARNS MEIGS AWARD

**ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1**, at 7 pm, the Schuylkill Center presents the 10th annual Henry Meigs Award for Environmental Leadership, named in honor of one of our founders. This year's winner is Robert A. Mercer, soon retiring after a stellar 40-year career directing the Silver Lake Nature Center in Bristol.

Since joining Silver Lake in 1975, Mercer, as many call him, has overseen the development of the Center, increasing its size from



60 to 235 acres, expanding its staff, growing a Friends organization with a budget that complements the county-run facility, and just completing a renovation of its building and exhibits.

A mentor to many of the region's environmental educators, he is a founder and long-active member of the Association of Conservation Executives, an umbrella group for the region's environmental education center directors. A leader within the

national Association of Nature Center Administrators, he has traveled the country consulting at nature centers on issues related to fundraising, facilities, programming, etc. He was highly involved in the Schuylkill Center-led Regional Environmental Education Program, which crafted a unified environmental education curriculum in 80s and 90s.

Bob's award anchors an evening focused on the future. Bob will present his thoughts on the future of nature centers, then is joined by a panel discussion that includes

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to improve understanding of and engagement with climate change issues. The question was, how could the Schuylkill Center work with partners, combining our strengths to increase our capacity to reach youth and community members in Philadelphia? How could we effectively teach about climate change in a way that was both fun and solutions-focused?

Drawing inspiration from the watershed that connects us, we developed a project around stormwater, a key impact to the Philadelphia area from climate change. Combining art and science, the students would focus on the potential damage of increasingly intense rainstorms, and what we can do about it.

In July, 30 Mill Creek 4-6th graders and 20 Overbrook high school students went for a tour of the Mill Creek watershed, which covers both neighborhoods. This highly urbanized area from Narberth to West Philadelphia drains into the former Mill Creek, now piped into a sewer. Stu-

dents were surprised to learn that Philadelphia's sewer system is largely comprised of streams that are now hidden by urban infrastructure. As we followed Mill Creek via bus, the tour took us deeper into the city where the students related their own narratives to the tale of the stream. We were interested to hear revelations and observations from the students, who asked questions like "why would they cover the stream and put a train next to it?" "Don't the houses flood when it rains?" and "What happens to the stuff that lives in the stream when the stream goes underground?" The students from Overbrook told us the story of a strip of row homes that collapsed in a sinkhole caused by Mill Creek running under the streets of their neighborhood. Now, the informal name of the playground ("The Pit") reflects this interesting past.

A week later, LandLab artist Leslie Birch worked with those same students to create an installation out of recycled denim representing the historic Mill Creek on Mill Creek Farm's street-facing fence, raising awareness about stormwater impacts from climate change. Some students were deeply engaged in weaving the work, creating undulating patterns along the fence.

Others were taken with model rowhouses provided by CUSP, which show how stormwater moves through neighborhoods (complete with 3D printed rain barrels). At Mill Creek, students also got to see stormwater solutions on the ground, like a green roof that everyone wanted to walk around on.



In August, the students visited the Schuylkill Center to explore stormwater through art with Birch in a more natural setting. They visited sites where Birch's StormSnakes installations mitigate stormwater erosion and made their own predictions about the impacts of heavy rain.

The students placed small tree rounds dyed with natural materials where they thought the water would reach in 1 and 3 years. One of our favorite moments was hearing the disbelief from these city-dwelling students and chaperones alike that water could have such power to do damage – as well as the total wonder of finding frogs, turtles, and worms in the woods.

Through these different site-specific studies, using different techniques, students engaged in learning and exploring solutions to climate change. We hope it has empowered them to share what they learned with their friends and families – keeping this dialogue moving forward. ✨



## MEIGS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

education director Gail Farmer. Karen Young, director of the Fairmount Water Works, Brian Winslow of the Delaware Nature Society, and Jim Waltham of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association round out the panel that will peer into a crystal ball.

"For our 50th anniversary," said Mike Weilbacher, "we wanted to present the award to an environmental educator, and it doesn't go to a better or nicer person. Bob is the dean of the nature

center community, and I've called him dozens of times over the years for advice."

First given in 2006, previous Meigs winners include Governor Ed Rendell, longtime botanist Ann Rhoads, pioneering aquatic ecologist Tom Dolan, and the Clean Air Council's Joe Minnott.

The Meigs event is free, and includes refreshments and dessert. ✨



coming up:

10TH ANNUAL MEIGS AWARD

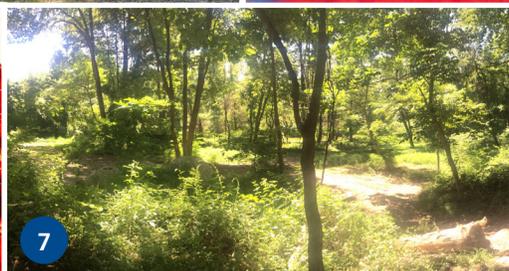
Thursday, October 1

Join us for a conversation on the future of nature centers, led by Bob Mercer.

# the season in brief

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM SUMMER 2015

- 1 At our **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary picnic** on July 11, we had a blast with over 100 friends and supporters. We all enjoyed a beautiful cake from Night Kitchen Bakery, dinner catered by the Weavers Way Co-op, and group wood carving with artist Nancy Agati.
- 2 Nine artists displayed their work in **Open Spaces**, an indoor and outdoor exhibition in collaboration with Art in the Open. Below, Josh Harris' *Two Currents* stood within our cherry maze near the greenhouse.
- 3 On July 1 staff gathered to mark the exact **50th anniversary** of our founding.
- 4 Our annual **wineberry harvest** drew 45 people this summer. We also enjoyed record-setting attendance at our shooting star watching event, and had a lot of fun learning natural dyeing and foraged beer brewing.
- 5 At our **annual butterfly count** 17 people gathered and observed 87 butterflies from 17 species, including the rare harvester, photographed on a baseball cap.
- 6 At summer camp this year, **393 children** spent time playing, exploring, and adventuring in our fields and forests.
- 7 Work on **Jubilee Grove** continues, with our planting day scheduled for early September. Over the summer we collected notes, soil, and letters to go into the time capsule to be buried in Jubilee Grove.
- 8 This fall we say goodbye to our summer interns **Beth Crawford** and **Kiley Sotomayor** and welcome our new Nature Preschool staff (below, left to right:) **Rachael Bowen, Kyle Oram, Zachary Cone, Alyssa McIntyre, Kim Purtle, Kristina Eaddy, and Samantha Roth.**



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## support

THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER

Help us lay the groundwork for another 50 years of leadership, education, and people + nature.

Make a gift to support the Schuylkill Center today.



# this fall

AT THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER



*an invitation*  
for members only

## JUBILEE IN THE GROVE

Saturday, October 10

Join us for the dedication of Jubilee Grove. It's the final event of the anniversary celebrations! Enjoy the beauty of nature, refreshments, beer, wine, and botanical cocktails.

### WELLNESS DAY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

Spend a day immersed in nature rejuvenating your body and clearing your mind. See details online.

