

# quill

NEWSLETTER FROM THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION | SPRING 2015



TWINLEAF IS ONE OF THE FOREST'S EARLIEST-BLOOMING WILDFLOWERS. THE SPLIT LEAF MAKES THIS LITTLE FLOWER EASY TO IDENTIFY.

## A FRESH BUILDING FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

By Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director

**SPRING BRINGS MANY CHANGES TO THE**  
Schuylkill Center this year, separate from blossoming wildflowers, leafing trees, and migrating birds.

This year, it brings new restrooms, freshened up classrooms, and a fully functional auditorium. Just in time for our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

As we've noted before, our 1968 building has been heated all these years by a large, eco-unfriendly oil furnace. In the last decade, that system has been failing rapidly, our hardworking staff spending too much time addressing it with fixes worthy of *MacGyver*. Our auditorium's hulking air conditioner has already died, compromising our ability to offer summer programs there.

So this winter, a swarm of contractors descended on the building's east side, erected a temporary partition, and went to work. When the wall comes down in April, that whole side of the building will boast new highly efficient heating and air conditioning. Our growing Nature Preschool classrooms will sport new energy-efficient windows, warmer floors, insulated roofs, and fresh paint in many places. Two additional classrooms will have been brought on line for use as the preschool expands.

### in this issue:

NEW SPRING LECTURES & WORKSHOPS FOR ADULTS, PAGE 3

EDIBLE ECOLOGY, PAGE 4

INVESTIGATING VINES, PAGE 5

HONORING BINNEY MEIGS & JULIE SPAHR, PAGE 6

Our public restrooms will have new low-flow toilets, sinks, flooring, and paint. Our auditorium will get new flooring, new windows, a fresh coat of paint, a new sound system, and soundproofing to address the echoes from concrete-block walls. It also gets a working kitchenette, perfect for not only programming use but for our evolving rental program.

So when you visit us this spring, you'll be coming to a new-and-improved building. But we're not done yet: this is just the be-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



50 YEARS  OF PEOPLE + NATURE

**50** The Schuylkill Center



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The year-long celebration of our 1965 founding as the first nature center in a large American city continues this spring, and we have a special invitation for you:

This year, we're establishing Jubilee Grove. Join me in planting trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. If you do, you leave a lasting legacy for the next 50 years.

Jubilee Grove will be a new part of our landscape, a collection of native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers near Cattail Pond, where the trail drops down from our backyard to a nexus of many trail connections. It's our most-traveled, most-used, highest-profile area. In the center of the grove, we'll place our time capsule – you will have a chance to add to this spring and summer – which will be opened in 2040, 25 years in the future. And there will be benches where you can rest and meditate, encircled by a stand of flowering trees.

In the fall, we'll host a jubilee in Jubilee Grove – how could we not – to mark the formal ending of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

So we're asking members like you to endow the grove, and tucked into this newsletter is a reply envelope with details. For a gift of \$100, we'll plant a tree like black cherry, for \$75 a smaller tree like redbud; \$50 endows a shrub like spicebush, and \$25 a wildflower. For \$500 and more, we'll put your name on a plaque in Jubilee Grove.

At the June 27 anniversary picnic we'll add items to the time capsule, then, at the September restoration workday, you can help us plant Jubilee Grove, and in a special ceremony at October's jubilee, we'll seal and bury the time capsule and dedicate Jubilee Grove.

My family is placing a red maple in the grove. I invite you to join me in establishing Jubilee Grove in this, our 50<sup>th</sup> year, a gift for the future.

Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director  
[mike@schuylkillcenter.org](mailto:mike@schuylkillcenter.org) | 215-482-7300, x125

## STAFF

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 Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director  
 Michele Wellard, Assistant Wildlife Rehabilitator  
 Elisabeth Zafiris, Public Programs Manager

# NEW SPRING LECTURES & WORKSHOPS FOR ADULTS

By Elisabeth Zafiris, Public Programs Manager

**THIS SEASON IS BRINGING BIG CHANGES** to our building—but also to our program calendar. This spring, we're offering more adult programs than ever before, programs that cross all disciplines – art, natural history, culture, and craft. As much as children need to explore and learn through nature, adults do too, and our spring calendar offers myriad ways for you to dive into nature.

Starting off on the spring equinox, **Dirt & Dessert** offers an evening of wine and desserts, paired with learning about soil science and how to get your garden ready for spring, as well as talking with a Land-Lab artist about how soil inspires his work.

April brings the return of **University of Nature** on the 11<sup>th</sup>, a one-day symposium for adults. We'll have lectures on permaculture, and ecology, as well as hands-on workshops on plant identification, bird

behavior, mushrooms, and more.

In May we're holding a completely new program, in partnership with Home Brewed Events: **Invasive Brewing** on May 9. Learn about the history of beer brewing, and then harvest invasive plants to make some of your own (come back after it's fermented to pick up your portion).

Later in the month, on May 21, we have a lecture on the history of the land which, in 1965, became the Schuylkill Center. **Hidden History of the Schuylkill Center** is a lecture co-hosted by Hidden City Philadelphia; you'll find out how our 340-acre property almost became, first, the Chestnut Hill-to-Bryn Mawr Avenue, a boulevard over the Schuylkill River to the Main Line, and then, believe it or not, the site of the United Nations.

We're also excited to bring back **Food for Thought**, our series in partnership with



THE MYCOPOLITAN MUSHROOM COMPANY JOINS US AT **UNIVERSITY OF NATURE**. THEY'LL BE LEADING A WORKSHOP ON SUPPORTING WILD MUSHROOM POPULATIONS TO BUILD A HEALTHY FOREST AND ENJOY FORAGED FOOD.



THE TEAM FROM HOME BREWED EVENTS WILL COME OUT TO TALK BEER AT **INVASIVE BREWING** IN MAY, THEN LEAD A HIKE TO FORAGE FOR INVASIVE PLANTS TO BREW.

## coming up:

**DIRT & DESSERT: ART & THE SCIENCE OF SOIL, MARCH 21**

**UNIVERSITY OF NATURE, APRIL 11**

**RESTORING THE LAND THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL ART, APRIL 26**

**INVASIVE BREWING, MAY 9**

**THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER, MAY 21**

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT, MAY 28**

Weavers Way Co-op. On May 28, we'll be talking about how to connect with the land right here in Philadelphia. ↗

*For all our spring programs and more details, see [www.schuylkillcenter.org/events](http://www.schuylkillcenter.org/events).*



THIS 1895 MAP SHOWS HISTORIC PROPERTY BOUNDARIES. NOTICE THE "HY. H. HOUSTON" PROPERTIES. ONE RUNS ALONG A ROAD THAT LATER BECAME THE CENTER'S DRIVEWAY. IN 1965 HOUSTON'S GRANDDAUGHTER, ELEANOR HOUSTON SMITH, BECAME ONE OF THE CENTER'S FOUNDERS. FIND OUT ALL ABOUT IT AT **THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER** ON MAY 21.

# naturalist's notebook

## EDIBLE ECOLOGY

By Anna Lehr Mueser, Public Relations Manager

**IMAGINE A NEW KIND OF GARDEN:** AN open field turns gradually into a wooden forest, fruit and nut trees mingling to offer shade and cooler microclimates on the forest floor, where mushrooms grow among shade-tolerant berry bushes. Above, dozens of insects move among the trees, eating the fruit and nuts, carrying pollen between flowers throughout the year. In the field a mix of shrubs and herbs form patterns; microclimates produced by one plant offer the perfect environment for another.



PAWPAW IS A NATIVE TREE WHICH BEARS DELICIOUS FRUIT.

This is a garden, filled with flowers and herbs to cook, vegetables to harvest year after year, fruit to enjoy if you can get there before the birds. But this is not the kind of garden where you bring out the rototiller each spring and plow under last year's crops. Here, each plant will grow for years, decades even, producing many different kinds of food, for the gardener, and for the ecosystem they work with. This is permaculture.

The term permaculture originated in the 1970s to describe a new kind of agriculture, one that emphasizes perennial garden planning and a way of growing food within a landscape. In its essence, permaculture combines natural ecology with farming. While for centuries agriculture was based on the idea of wresting order from wildness (think early European colonists up through tidy gardens today), permaculture could be seen as a radical step to the side.

To me, it seems that permaculture extends a love of nature, of ecology and the complex natural systems that we live with, to how we grow our food.

Permaculture offers a unique blend of human culture and nature: the garden, planted and tended by a gardener, is governed by natural processes, and aligned with the ecosystem it is a part of. Rather than fighting back weeds that encroach more with each day, the permaculture garden integrates them, using the strengths of each plant to support others. By combining a deep knowledge of the local ecosystem, the patterns of plants that shape it and the needs of the animals that are a part of it, with strategic planting and maintenance, it's possible to create a long-term garden that will grow more productive and beautiful each year. The garden becomes a practice in living with the earth, learning how your piece of land works, how your ecosystem functions, and how you can live and grow with it. ☀

WANT TO LEARN MORE  
ABOUT GROWING YOUR OWN  
PERMACULTURE GARDEN?

JOIN US AT UNIVERSITY OF NATURE  
ON APRIL 11<sup>TH</sup> FOR "ECOLOGY AS A  
DESIGN SCIENCE."

## NATIVE PLANT SALE CELEBRATES LAND STEWARDSHIP

**JOIN US AT THE MEMBERS-ONLY NATIVE PLANT SALE PREVIEW ON FRIDAY, MAY 1, FOR A BOTANICAL HAPPY HOUR,** WITH A special chance to meet our new Director of Development, Ka-Msiyara Corbett and our new Director of Land and Facilities, Stephen Goin. It's also a chance to get a priority look at the thousands of native wildflowers, shrubs, trees, grasses, and other plants - before the public sale on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Remember, members enjoy a 10% discount at the plant sale, as well as a free wildflower. At 5:30 we'll gather for a special toast celebrating our land stewardship work, and 50 years of people and nature at the Schuylkill Center. ☀

MEMBERS-ONLY PREVIEW  
*Friday, May 1, 4 – 7 pm*

NATIVE PLANT SALE  
*Saturday, May 2, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm*  
*Sunday, May 3, 9 am – 1 pm*



# the wild side

## CROWD CELEBRATES CLINIC AT CREATURE COMFORT

AT FEBRUARY'S CREATURE COMFORT a happy crowd gathered to see animals cared for at our wildlife clinic, bringing along a heaping pile of donated supplies to get the clinic ready for spring. Rick Schubert, director of the wildlife clinic, explained how the clinic cares for sick, injured,



and orphaned wild creatures, and gave visitors the chance to learn a little more about the clinic's work.

Spring is coming soon and with it hundreds of baby squirrels, birds, and more will come pouring into the clinic. Want to help out? Stop by the visitor center and drop off supplies! ↗

### clinic wish list

PAPER TOWELS  
TOILET PAPER AND TISSUES  
BLEACH  
LIQUID LAUNDRY OR DISH DETERGENT  
BATH TOWELS  
JARRED BABY FOOD  
CANNED OR DRY CAT OR DOG FOOD  
PEDIALLYTE ORAL ELECTROLYTE SOLUTION  
ROLLED GAUZE OR GAUZE PADS  
FLEECE CLOTHS OR BLANKETS

## INVESTIGATING VINES: ARTISTS REFLECT ON LANDLAB

By Zya Levy and Kaitlin Pomerantz, LandLab resident artist group WE THE WEEDS

FOR OUR LANDLAB RESIDENCY WE THE WEEDS chose to examine invasive plants, inviting the public to participate in weaving panels from invasive vines such as oriental bitter-sweet, wisteria, and mile-a-minute weed, which are abundant on the Center property. We were inspired by their horrific beauty - the vines themselves graceful and spiraling crowned with bright clusters of berries, but occurring in such quantity and mass as to carpet the landscape, in places creating a rolling sea of non-native browns and greens.

Through our work and weaving we wish to highlight the rapid and alarming change of species composition while recognizing plant communities as fluid, ever-shifting systems that react to time and environmental stress. We have been asking ourselves questions such as why is an invasive species successful? How has the environment changed? How did these plants fit, ecologically and culturally, in their place of origin? What

new roles do these plants play in this ecosystem? Could these new roles be beneficial in any way? If so, how does that balance against their negative impacts? And finally, what should, or can, be done about it all?

Though many of our questions remain unanswered, our woven panels, which will be used to create an outdoor installation this



spring, are a reflection on the early successional, blanketing nature of the invasive vines, for better or worse - casting dark shadows on native seedlings while swaddling a fragmented and human disturbed landscape. ↗

*LandLab is an environmental art residency program that integrates art, ecological restoration, and public engagement, and is a joint project of the Schuylkill Center and the Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA).*

WE WERE INSPIRED BY THEIR HORRIFIC BEAUTY - GRACEFUL AND SPIRALING, BUT CARPETING THE LANDSCAPE



# volunteer spotlight

## CELEBRATING BINNEY MEIGS & JULIE SPAHR

By Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director

**THIS YEAR'S ENCHANTED FOREST PARTY** on May 15 honors two special volunteers, Binney Meigs and Julie Spahr. We'd love to share their Schuylkill stories.

### BINNEY MEIGS

At a January meeting, the Center's trustees presented a resolution to sculptor Binney Meigs, honoring him for nine years of service on the board, three as president.

The Schuylkill Center runs through his blood. As a young child, Binney grew up on the Center's land, playing in our fields and forests, and his parents Henry and Ellen Mary played large roles in our founding. Henry worked closely alongside founding director Dick James to create the center, Ellen Mary becoming deeply involved in the volunteer-led Project TREND teaching program.

When Henry passed away in 2005, "recognizing my father's legacy, and all the effort he had exerted, I joined the board to continue his work," he said recently. "It's been a fascinating and enriching experience that continues today." In the decade



since joining the board, Binney logged thousands of miles traveling between Roxborough and his Berkshires home.

"His quiet wisdom and even-tempered approach," notes the resolution, "infuses everything we have done since 2006." Thank you, Binney, for such remarkable service and support.

### JULIE SPAHR

Maybe no one in Schuylkill Center history has worn as many hats as Julie Spahr. As a young mother and active outdoorswoman, Julie was hired as the staff's first development officer in the early 1970s, served as a volunteer teacher in a variety of programs, and became a trustee, serving in that capacity for more than 20 years and, in the 1980s, serving as our first woman board president. Today, she is active in the Advisory Committee of former presidents.

"I first visited the nature center in 1971," she recalls, "after reading a great article about it in The Philadelphia Inquirer. I came in, met with Dick, and he thrust this book into my hands, 'The Working Philosophies of the Schuylkill Center.' I took



the book home, read it, and got really excited."

She returned, met with Dick, and agreed she would work on raising funds for the new organization. With little room in our young offices, Dick set up a second table in his own office for Julie.

"People get really attached to the Schuylkill Center," she says, noting her own 40-plus year attachment. "It's like a big family. And there's this incredible property you steward, along with the wonderful mission of teaching kids who don't have access to nature."

For 43 wonderful years—and counting!—of connecting people to the Schuylkill Center, thank you, Julie! ✉

## enchanted forest party

**FRIDAY, MAY 15 | 6:30 PM**

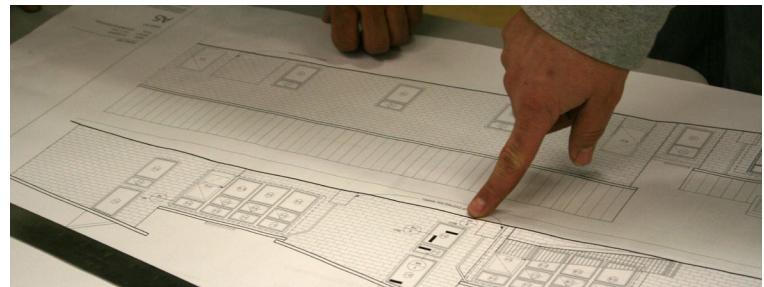
Join us in the beautiful spring forest to celebrate 50 years of people and nature.

## FRESH BUILDING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ginning of the changes we will be instituting as the Schuylkill Center moves into the next chapter of our rich history.

"It's been a long time coming," sang the sultry Sam Cooke in 1963, "but I know a change gonna come."

Big change is coming in April: come see for yourself. And those changes will soon ripple across the rest of the building and into our landscape. Happy spring. ✉



# the season in brief

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM WINTER 2015

- 1 This winter we welcomed two new members of our senior staff, **Ka-Msiyara Corbett**, our new director of development, and **Stephen Goin**, our new director of land and facilities. We're thrilled to be joined by these two wonderful people.
- 2 For a fun throwback: these daisies were photographed in May 1974, 41 years ago.
- 3 We kicked off 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in January at the annual **Richard L. James Lecture**. An audience of over 100 enjoyed Mary Mattingly's lecture and the following panel discussion. Panelists (left to right): Mary Salvante, Mary Mattingly, Bethany Wiggin, and Maya van Rossum.
- 4 We had a blast with LandLab artists Kaitlin Pomerantz and Zya Levy, of **WE THE WEEDS** at the December botanical cocktail hour and weaving salon.



- 5 In January we welcomed four new members of our board of trustees (left to right): Third-generation banker **Christopher P. McGill** is the president and CEO of East River Bank, and lives in Center City; **Gary Clarke** is a real estate attorney with Saul Ewing, residing in Center City; **Keith Kowalski** is the manager of PECO's environmental programs and resides in Lafayette Hill; **Christopher Ball** of Chestnut Hill is a partner in the environmental law firm of Manko, Gold, Katcher, and Fox.
- 6 During renovations, **Nature Preschool** has migrated over to the west wing of the building. Here they are in the Dick James Room, currently the Sycamore classroom.
- 7 In honor of this year's Martin Luther King, Jr Day of Service, 80 students from **St. Joseph's University** and **Springside Chestnut Hill Academy** joined us to help clear brush from the edge of our property, making a safer and more welcoming entrance.



50 YEARS  OF PEOPLE + NATURE

# 50 The Schuylkill Center



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SPRING 2015

in this issue:

NEW SPRING LECTURES  
& WORKSHOPS FOR  
ADULTS, PAGE 3

EDIBLE ECOLOGY, PAGE 4

HONORING BINNEY  
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THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER

Join us at the Enchanted Forest  
on May 15 for a magical  
evening celebrating 50 years of  
people + nature.



# this spring

AT THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER



  
PHILADELPHIA  
SCIENCE  
FESTIVAL

NATUREPALOOZA!  
FAMILY EARTH DAY FESTIVAL  
SATURDAY, APRIL 25

NATIVE PLANT SALE  
SATURDAY, MAY 2 & SUNDAY, MAY 3



JOIN US AT A SPECIAL MEMBERS-ONLY  
PREVIEW, FRIDAY, MAY 1

