



## jerome shabazz and sabirah mahmud THE 2020 HENRY MEIGS ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP AWARDEES

**IN A VIRTUAL CEREMONY IN NOVEMBER**, we happily presented the 15th annual Henry Meigs Environmental Leadership Award to Jerome Shabazz, the founder and director of the Overbrook Environmental Education Center in West Philadelphia. In addition, Sabirah Mahmud, a 17-year-old high school senior at the Academy at Palumbo in Philadelphia, was presented with the Henry Meigs Youth Environmental Leadership Award for her work leading climate strikes statewide (see our sidebar article on page 6).

The highest honor we provide, the award is named for Henry Meigs, one of our founders whose family donated the land that became the Schuylkill Center, and who then served on our board for 40 years until passing away in 2005. His family established the award shortly thereafter, and past honorees include former governor Ed Rendell, artist Stacy Levy, and nature center leader Bob Mercer.

Executive Director Mike Weilbacher says, “we are thrilled to bestow this award on Jerome. He has worked for decades to address structural inequalities in environmental education, that too few of our centers deliver programs to the people who need them the most. And he created an environmental center not in greenspace, but on Lancaster Avenue, on an industrial site—this is remarkable, and huge.”

Jerome sees his life’s work as addressing environmental justice. “We live in a community with significant health disparities

driven by environmental conditions,” he says. “I want the public to know that as a civilized society, we are entitled to enjoy the inheritance of a healthy environment and appreciate it as a normal birthright.” He goes on to say, “where you wake up is the first place to focus your environmentalism. Our work to improve the air, water, and land serves our fellow citizens. If we can positively impact a neighbor’s life because of our work, then we have served our community in a meaningful way.”

Jerome’s professional journey started more than 20 years ago when he began working for a company dedicated to stormwater management. From there, he transitioned into a municipal job at a wastewater treatment facility that high school and college students toured to learn about wastewater treatment. Jerome soon noticed a dearth of students taking advantage of this precious educational resource provided free by the city. After delving further, he realized “not all students had the relationships with companies to set up tours so they could learn more about the environment.”

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Recognizing this void, he and his wife



**ABOVE:** JEROME TEACHING STUDENTS FROM OVERBROOK ELEMENTARY ABOUT A SOLAR POWERED TRASH COMPACTOR.



# director's cut

## CHANGING THE CLIMATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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**AS I WRITE THIS, JOE BIDEN WAS NAMED PRESIDENT-ELECT** but the myriad of legal challenges have not all played out. Still, my assumption is that the Biden-Harris team takes the country's reins in January. Which is great news on the climate front, as President Trump had famously withdrawn America from the Paris Agreement on climate, and ironically, the treaty's timing was such that our participation ended the day after Election Day.

Biden has said all along that he will return to the Paris accord, which he reiterated when he was named the winner. In fact, he added Paris to his long list of Day One activities.

No matter how you feel about the treaty, there are at least two relevant facts you should know. For one, 179 countries have formally adopted the plan—that's out of 195 countries in all—and among the few holdouts are Russia, Turkey, Syria, Iran...and us. And two, the agreement is a loose framework designed to keep global temperatures from rising more than two degrees Celsius—a number scientists agree would be catastrophic. (We've already climbed 1.2 degrees.) Most close watchers of the accord have long

agreed it was not enough, so even though the Paris plan was contentious, it would never get us to where we need to be. But at least it got the world around one table talking.

The bad news for Pennsylvania—where America's oil was first discovered in 1859, where huge coal fields have been mined for generations, where coal powered the rise of Bethlehem Steel and the Pennsylvania Railroad, where fracking has been hailed as the future of fuel—is that the age of fossil fuels is over. The sooner we admit this, the better the state will be.

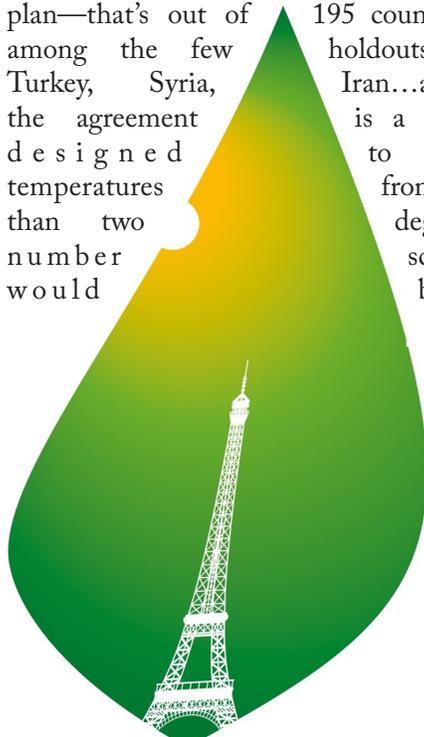
But remember this: a greener energy future means MORE jobs for Pennsylvanians, not less, as wind and solar ramp up.

As Election Day dawned, a typhoon with gusts of 235 mph plowed into the Philippines to become the strongest storm to make landfall in world history. The earth was reminding us loudly that climate change is not only real, but worse than we imagined. For most of the world, climate change long ago crossed the threshold from heresy to conventional wisdom, and we have a quickly diminishing window of opportunity to address climate.

In a Biden presidency, we thankfully have a shot, and for that alone I am grateful.



Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director  
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# from the clinic

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

**OUR WILDLIFE CLINIC, THE ONLY ONE IN PHILADELPHIA,** relies heavily on our team of dedicated volunteers to maintain the facility and provide high-quality, consistent care for the thousands of injured, ill, and orphaned wild animals we treat each year.



Normally, we would have a weekly influx of 40-60 volunteers, but we've had to curtail our on-site volunteers to 1-2 per day due to COVID. However, given the public's tremendous interest in the clinic, Director Chris Strub and Assistant Director Liz Ellmann have come up with creative new ways to engage volunteers who want to assist us in our efforts.

Liz, who manages our robust volunteer program, says, "keeping our volunteers involved and safe has been a huge priority so we're moving forward with some off-site opportunities. We're creating a dedicated transport team and training for much-needed assistance with our 24-hour phone hotline."

Some individuals are not able to bring injured wildlife to our clinic. In that case, our transport volunteers would pick up the animals, in secured containers, of course, and bring them in for treatment. Transport volunteers also take animals from our clinic to another rehabilitator when we need to transfer them for specialized care. To become a transport volunteer, interested people would need to attend our clinic's online introductory volunteer information session and a 2-hour transportation-specific training.

**ABOVE:** VOLUNTEER DEANNA MARTIN FEEDS JUVENILE SQUIRRELS CONVALESCING INSIDE.

**RIGHT:** VOLUNTEER STACEY VERNICK PREPARES FOOD FOR THE OUT-SIDE ANIMALS.

If working from home is appealing, then perhaps volunteering to answer our 24-hour hotline might be a good fit. "Right now," Chris notes, "we receive between 5-10 calls each day on our hotline. During our busy season, that could swell to almost 50. We are the 'go-to' resource when people need help with what to do if they find an orphaned or injured animal." Trained volunteers help callers determine what the best course of action is before attempting to contain an animal or bring it to the clinic.

Since the start of the pandemic, our small but mighty volunteer team has helped shepherd young squirrels through to adolescence, fed and cleaned dozens of window-strike bird patients, transported animals for release, and plowed through mountains of dishes and laundry. They are the reason our clinic remains ready to help the many injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife coming through our doors every day. 🦋



For more information about volunteering at the Wildlife Clinic, please email: [volunteer@schuylkillcenter.org](mailto:volunteer@schuylkillcenter.org) or complete our online form.



# volunteer spotlight

## CHRISTOPHER MCGILL

**AS THE FALL BEGAN**, our Board of Trustees, 20 volunteers who give an extraordinary amount of time to the center, elected Christopher McGill as our new President while bringing six new trustees onto the board.

A trustee since 2015 who had previously served as treasurer, Christopher is a native Philadelphian who comes from a family of community bankers going back three generations; his grandfather founded Roxborough Manayunk Federal Savings & Loan on Ridge Avenue. Christopher himself established East River Bank in the 1990s, and as part of his professional outreach, he came to know the Schuylkill Center and found an organization that aligned with his appreciation of the outdoors and nature. (East River has since merged into S&T Bank.)



ABOVE: CHRISTOPHER MCGILL

Christopher is also active with the North Light Community Center, the well-loved Manayunk site for youth and families-in-need that his banking grandfather helped found during the Depression. We've partnered with them on many initiatives, including Neighborhood Naturalists described on page 6.

In addition, at the same annual meeting, Erin Mooney and Keith Kowalski were elected as vice presidents, Mary Ann Boyer as secretary, and Gregg Mohrmann as treasurer. Six new board members joined the board for three-year terms, including Jenn Asplundh, Lisa Auerbach, Dina Bleckman, Tom Kehoe, Ted Mucellin, and Gail Scott.

Given that 2020 has been a pivotal year, Christopher is optimistic about the future of the Center and is excited for the challenges and opportunities ahead. "We have a lot of fresh ideas from our new board members. If we pair that with institutional knowledge of our 'old' board, we are in a great position to steer the Center through this pandemic and beyond." ✂

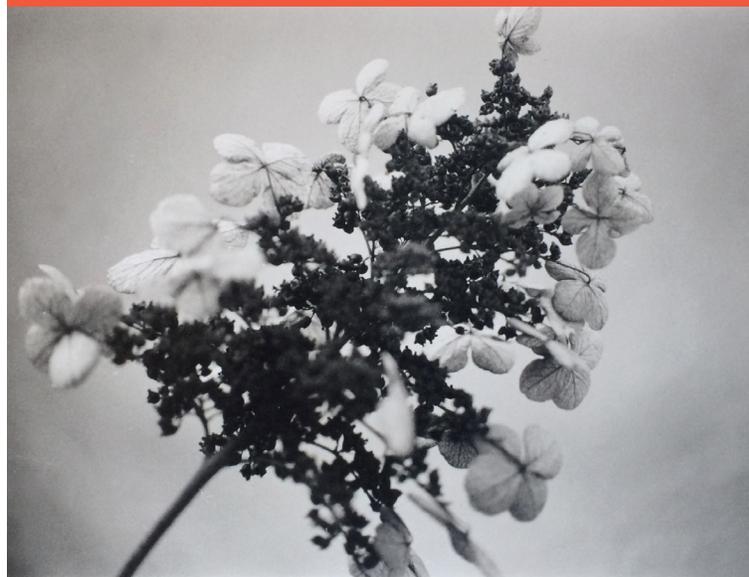
# citizen's eye

## A KALEIDOSCOPE OF NATURE

**FOR MANY OF US**, the pandemic has fueled our desire to be outside in nature, especially in times when we're spending our lives physically apart. So the surprising miracles of nature have become a refuge—even a sanctuary—that helps us to breathe and recharge. In hopes of creating a sense of community, we are inviting you to share your impressions of the outdoors in our upcoming exhibition.

Citizen's Eye will take the form of a digital photo album with images taken by you during the pandemic. All submissions will be curated into a kaleidoscopic display, presented both in our gallery and on our website. We invite you to choose and share with us your favorite photograph or snapshot of an encounter with nature, taken during the last half year. ✂

Free and open to everyone of all ages, you can submit your photograph by visiting [schuylkillcenter.org](https://www.schuylkillcenter.org)



ABOVE: © PHOTOGRAPH: LIZ JELSOMINE, 2020 / WWW.JELSOMINE.COM



# an un-BEA-lievable 20 years

BEA KELLY

**IF YOU'VE PHONED THE SCHUYLKILL CENTER** to register for a program, sign your child up for summer camp, or inquire about Nature Preschool, you've probably had the pleasure of speaking with Beatrice Kelly.

In October, Bea, as everyone calls her, just marked 20 years at the Schuylkill Center, and we wanted to share highlights about her two decades with us. A native Philadelphian who grew up in the Northwest section of town, Bea first came to the Center in 2000 as a part-time educator, but soon transitioned to receptionist, becoming the face of the organization for the next 15 years. Bea recalls, "it was always satisfying to help anyone who came through our front door because everyone is usually surprised and delighted at what they find when they explore our trails." More recently, she is our registrar, enrolling everyone in all of our programs.

Mike Weilbacher, our executive director, notes, "at a time when it's incredibly rare that people stay at one workplace for 20 years, we are very lucky that Bea has been a warm, welcoming presence at our front door for two decades. In fact, Dick James, our founding director, may be the only other person in our organization's history to hit this mark. It's been a remarkable run, Bea has seen a lot of growth and change, and we hope she stays on for 20 more!"

When asked about colleagues or mentors that influenced her, Bea gave a shout-out to our volunteers. "I think there's something miraculous when people give freely of their time." While the individual tasks may not seem significant, Bea notes, "their collective benefits are immeasurable. Their work over the years has made the Center run much more smoothly." Director of Education Aaliyah Green Ross comments, "I've relied on Bea during my time here. She is always a great resource when it comes to what works when we're planning education and public programs."

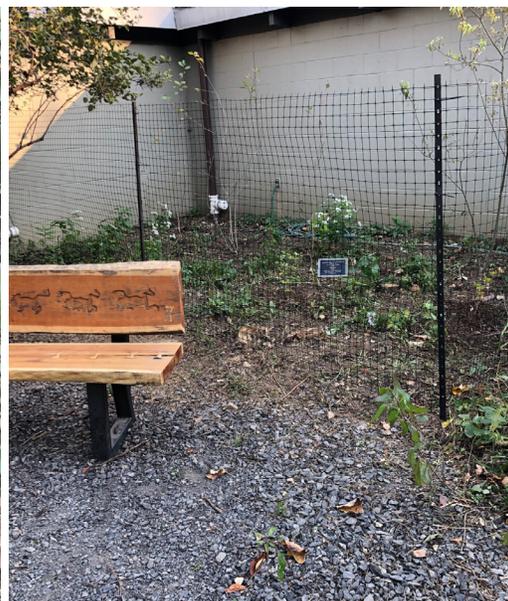
Bea's pre-COVID workspace had a special vantage point as her desk is in our glass-walled lobby, very close to a bird feeding station. "On one spring day," she recounted, "when we had the doors propped open, a family of geese with several goslings walked in the front door, through the lobby, and right out the back door." Some unusual birds she's seen at the feeders are red-breasted nuthatches, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and indigo buntings. And she typically writes these sightings on a chalkboard in the lobby so our visitors know what cool creatures are afoot.

To thank Bea, we have dedicated a "bee-friendly" garden at our front entrance, planting, among other things, chokeberry and viburnum, two shrubs with berries that attract birds, plus phlox, coneflower, and aster—flowers that pollinators like bees crave. These will bring birds and insects to our front door to visit Bea.

We hope you will visit too. 🐝



BEA ON OUR DRIVEWAY



BEE-FRIENDLY POLLINATOR GARDEN



# no internet needed

## FOR OUR NATURE EXPLORATION KITS

**OUR NEIGHBORHOOD NATURALIST KITS** are a new way for school-age kids to explore nature in their own neighborhood without the need for a car, computer, internet connection, or even a backyard.

Each kit contains field guides, materials for at-home nature crafts made from common household recyclables, our Trail Map, nature scavenger hunts, and tools, and activities needed to have a fully immersive nature experience. We include a stamped and addressed envelope so families can write to us with their observations or questions.

This initiative, funded by the Alliance for Watershed Education and PECO, has allowed the Schuylkill Center to engage communities and families who may not have access

to our Center. Currently, we distribute kits through North Light Community Center and three Early Literacy Centers in South Philly, Northern Liberties and Fairmount. We plan to expand the program's reach with more community partners throughout the city. 🦋



# jerome shabazz and sabirah mahmud

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

started a nonprofit organization in the late 90s dedicated to addressing this, which led to the formation of the Overbrook Environmental Education Center, an urban, community-based center dedicated to environmental education programs, literacy, nutrition, and wellness, for Overbrook youth and their families. They turned what was a contaminated, post-industrial dumping site into a viable, healthy, sustainable space in the Overbrook-Wynnefield neighborhood.

Jerome continues, “we wanted to create an opportunity for students to get out of the classroom and interact with the natural environment through experiential learning.” Given their close proximity to Mars Park and Indian Creek, the Center also provides a place where students can do hands-on activities in their backyard, like riparian

studies, tree identification, and water quality sampling. While Overbrook’s footprint is only two acres, they are standard-bearers of best practices in establishing a green space. If you visit their site at 61st and Lancaster Avenue, you’ll see green amenities like native plants, retention basins, and rain gardens.

Jerome says starting the OECC is “like philanthropy for me. This is my way of giving back, contributing, and helping to serve my neighbors.”

When asked what it means to him to be the latest recipient of this award, Jerome says, “it is an absolute honor that this year, I too will be recognized for my life’s work in environmental justice, sustainability and education.”

Congratulations, Jerome, and thank you for your legacy in Philadelphia. 🦋

**Sabirah Mahmud**, a 17-year-old high school senior and climate organizer at the Academy at Palumbo in Philadelphia, was presented with the Henry Meigs Youth Environmental Leadership Award for her work leading climate strikes statewide. As a Bangladeshi-American, she discovered a personal connection to the climate crisis when she learned that low-lying Bangladesh is highly threatened from rising seas and storms. This inspired her to found Philly Climate Strike, now Youth Climate Action Team Philly, in 2019, soon becoming

the Pennsylvania Chapter’s Executive Director. Sabirah wants youth to know that, “young people in Philadelphia and all over the world can make a difference in their communities through active engagement.” The Youth Award comes with a \$1,000 college scholarship.



# the season in brief

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM FALL 2020

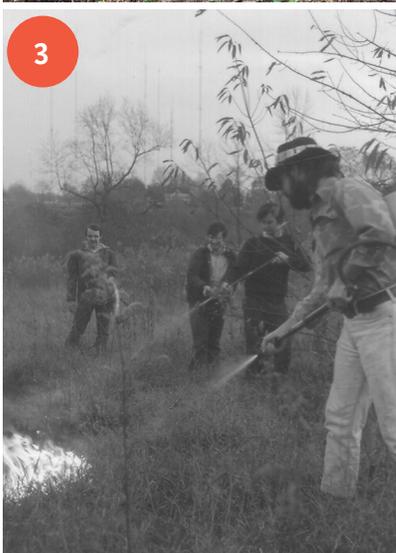
**1** In September, Eagle Scout candidate RJ Carbone of Wyndmoor, along with 51 volunteers, erected deer fencing and planted new trees to replace dying ash trees along Smith Run. This was possible through a grant from Treevitalize Watersheds 2020, an ongoing tree-planting project to improve stream quality by reducing stormwater runoff.

**2** Our spring benefit, the Enchanted Forest, was canceled by COVID, but that didn't stop us from celebrating our honoree, Kris Soffa. On a beautiful October day, we honored Kris's decades of service to the environment with a special tree planting in Founders Grove.

**3** Dana Tobin, 74, worked here for many years from the 70s into the 90s, and was founding executive director Dick James's right-hand man for many of those years. He sadly passed away this fall. In a shot from the 70s, he is in the foreground, fighting a brushfire in our meadow.

**4** Our longest-running festival, Halloween Hikes, sold out in October, becoming one of our first in-person programs this fall. Families had a chance to search for clues on our mystery-filled trails, make nature-inspired crafts, and meet-and-greet friendly nocturnal "animals."

**5** In November, families were treated to an outdoor concert presented by duo Ants on a Log. Known for their message of environmental action, this concert was presented in conjunction with our current art exhibition, "Ecotactical: Earth Day at 50," that can be visited in the gallery and on the trails.



quill  
WINTER 2020

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DICK JAMES LECTURE

*making art with invasives*

