In a year that brought so many unexpected changes and challenges, we took comfort in nature’s timeless elements—fresh air, migrating birds, and ponds filled with lotus and water lilies. A healthy and thriving Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens has never been more vital.

We have welcomed an increased number of visitors seeking to recreate and enjoy nature this year. Despite planning a full suite of programs early in the year, we changed gears when the park closed from mid-March to June and delivered high-quality virtual programs and experiences to youth and families. The pandemic and a reaffirmed commitment to anti-racism are now foundational to our approach and programs. We believe now more than ever, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens must listen and support its Black neighbors, and with that, increasingly serve as a community hub.

Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is committed to delivering on its core programs of stewardship, public engagement and education, while also making an intentional shift to become more partnership-forward and community-centered.

Recently, we received a note from a frequent visitor and neighbor; it said:

“I love this park. It feeds my soul.”

We couldn’t say it any better. Thank you for helping us celebrate and steward Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens.

Be well,

Tina O’Connell
Executive Director
Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

Martha Holley-Miers
Board Chair
Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens
The National Park Service worked hard this past spring and summer to keep this oasis beautiful when the world went into lockdown and they worked even harder to ensure our safety through the summer months. The creation of a pedestrian circulation pattern throughout the park was one of the many ways the National Park Service ensured a safe place for us to #RecreateResponsibly. FoKAG embraced this swell of visitation and spent the summer safely engaging with visitors at an outdoor welcome table, alongside the National Park Service, to help visitors navigate this new route and provide materials for self-guided strolls through the ponds and surrounding trails.

Parks across the country recorded high visitation numbers in 2020, and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was no exception. With safety protocols in place, visitors could get outside and reap the benefits of spending time in nature by all of us now more than ever. We repeatedly heard from visitors and community members that the park has provided much-needed comfort and solace, as well as space for the young (or young at heart!) to run, explore and play. With the outdoors being a “safer” gathering place, we’ve also seen friends meet up for walks and even small gatherings, including the introduction of newborns to extended family members. We look forward to continuing to be a place where people come to gather and heal as we come out of the pandemic.

This year greatly impacted our youth, both academically and socially. The transition from in-person to remote learning was not easy and remains a challenge for most. However, the outdoors and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens have always been our platforms for education. This year, our camp programs helped anchor families during a time of uncertainty to safe outdoor exploration and fun.

In place of our traditional Spring Break and Summer Camp activities, this summer we developed a modified camp experience that allowed for maximum safety and fun for the neighboring children. We hosted a four-week summer camp and fall family days that were a hybrid of online and in-park activities for children ages 6-10 and their families. Each Monday, we provided a contactless pick-up of materials and instructions for that week’s activities, as well as a family meal for four and a bag of fresh produce, to help meet families’ growing nutritional needs. Weekly themes included learning about nature, art, water, and plants and animals. Feedback from the camp programming had overwhelming gratitude and high marks for the camp, as it engaged entire families and centered them safely in the outdoors.

One mother wrote, “This was the best camp my kids attended all summer...We felt so supported and cared for. I’ve rarely had a camp make me feel that way.”

We can’t wait to provide another round of enjoyment in the coming year to our camp families!

Statistics & Accomplishments:
• 38 summer campers (and their families!)
• Four weeks packed with programming (both safe in-person and virtual activities!)
• 300+ participated in our family-led activities in the park, made possible by FoKAG efforts
• 100 % more connected to nature. On the last day of camp, participants answered a survey based on the American Camp Association’s Affinity for Nature Scale and Camp Connectedness Scale. We found that 100 percent of campers enjoyed learning about nature, and they enjoyed the activities they did at home.
Stewarding the Gardens
Cultivating A Healthy & Thriving Aquatic Gardens in a Pandemic

The large and committed FoKAG volunteer force was critical to a healthy and thriving park in 2020, primarily as NPS was unable to host volunteer events and use of the park and surrounding trails was higher than usual. As soon as events were allowed in September, we immediately activated our volunteer corps to clean the park and surrounding paths and riverbanks of months of accumulated trash.

FoKAG also hosted a crew of five local young adults over eight-weeks through the SCA (Student Conservation Association), who restored 3.3 miles of trails, including restoring over 1500 feet of pond banks for safer and wider trails throughout the park. During these two months, the crew took on the park’s task backlog and made significant progress on the long-term effort to remediate ponds and trails.

Statistics & Accomplishments:
- Three Covid-safe volunteer events, including National Public Lands Day and a postponed Earth Day
- 102 volunteers
- 306 hours of service
- 3.3 miles of trails stewarded by our SCA crew

FoKAG focused on developing materials to help visitors safely enjoy and explore the park, including a new brochure with an improved park map, scavenger hunts for families, a monthly photo contest, and plant and animal identification guides. These materials allow visitors to explore and understand the park more fully and independently, which has been essential given the visitor center’s closure and suspension of ranger-led tours.

The summer concert series and Lotus and Lily Festival were canceled. Still, we used this time to reconsider our role in best activating this space, especially now, when so many seek safe, outdoor places lacking in nearby, predominantly Black neighborhoods. Our first new partnership to come out of this effort is the creation of a new artist-in-residence program alongside Capital Fringe called Down To Earth. This partnership will offer paid artist residencies highlighting the climate emergency and systemic racism, using the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens landscape as inspiration. In 2020, in collaboration with the D.C. Oral History project, we continued to gather long-time Kenilworth residents’ oral histories to build relationships and connections with our park neighbors.

Statistics & Accomplishments:
- Five oral history interviews were collected for the D.C. Oral History Collaborative.
- 126% increase in photo contest entrants and over 300 photos submitted!
- Seven new park materials developed for an improved park experience.
- 156 new donors and 71% increase in individual giving this year with over $23,000 raised in 2020!
**2020 Financials**

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**2020 Year in Review**

- **102 volunteers engaged**
- **38 kids engaged in our free summer camp**
- **306 volunteer hours**
- **325 photos submitted in our photo contest**
- **5 stories captured in partnership with DCOHC**
- **7 materials developed for improved park experience**
- **3.3 miles of trail stewarded** (in park and on ART)

---

**Revenue**

- Foundation Grants: $110,100 (59%)
- Community Organization: $21,563 (12%)
- Individual Contributions: $22,570 (12%)
- Government Grants: $28,583 (15%)
- Corporate Contributions: $3,000 (2%)

**Total Income**: $185,816

---

**Expenses**

- Stewardship: $37,095 (16%)
- Public Engagement: $38,403 (17%)
- Education: $100,342 (43%)
- Fundraising: $24,684 (11%)
- Management & General: $31,604 (14%)

**Total Expenses**: $232,038

---

*These are the unaudited financials for 2020 and excludes our $17,600 PPP loan. Audited financials are forthcoming. Stay tuned!*
Friends of Kenilworth

AQUATIC GARDENS

A proud partner of the National Park Service

Park address: 1550 Anacostia Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20019

Office: 1212 Quincy St NW, Washington DC, 20011

kenaqgardens.org

Subscribe | Facebook | Instagram | Twitter

Photo: Chris Rief © 2020