



Friends of Kenilworth
AQUATIC GARDENS
2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Responding to Our
Neighbors' Needs

20/20 Vision: Resetting and Responding

Once a upon a time, a group of nature lovers started some chatter around their love for Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. It was a deeply rooted love (pun intended) because they knew that this neighborhood national park was simply a gem tucked and hidden away for just a few to happen upon. But they wanted more. They wanted the nation's only national park devoted to aquatic plant life to be the star that they saw it as, so they vowed to partner with the National Park Service to celebrate and preserve Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens through public engagement, programming and project support.

That was 20 years ago when Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was just a glimmer in the eyes of these community members and park lovers. The result after becoming an official organization in 2007: park cleanups, new signage, lotus and lily blooms, concerts in the park, and annual lotus water lily festivals. Together, we are thankful for our National Capital Area Park-East.

We each experienced trauma and challenge this year - personally, professionally, and collectively as a nation - but our work continued in 2021. Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was able to activate the park as a neighborhood resource, ensuring those who live nearby know of and enjoy the beauty, solace, and recreational opportunities the park provides - even during a pandemic. We made sure our park neighbors and visitors could rely on us as a place of respite, recreation and rejuvenation.

This year, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens fully committed to engaging its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion muscle, in addition to building deep connections with and among park neighbors through conversations, improving our

trails, designing signage, and enhancing our culturally enriching events, like the annual Lotus & Water Lily Festival, volunteer service, and youth camps. Further, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens added a community engagement and communications manager - a park neighbor - who is listening to residents to learn how we should be showing up for our community in an authentic and meaningful way.

National Capital Parks-East and Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are excited to make new friends and ensure park neighbors reclaim Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens as their neighborhood national park.

Learn more about our partnership and what we accomplished with your help this year in our 2021 annual report, *Responding to Our Neighbors' Needs*.

Signed,



Tina O'Connell

Tina O'Connell,
Executive Director,
Friends of Kenilworth
Aquatic Gardens



Tara Morrison

Tara Morrison,
Superintendent,
National Park Service

Meet Our Staff



Tina O'Connell
Executive Director



Zerline Hughes Spruill
Communication and
Community
Engagement Manager



Megan Singleton
AmeriCorps Vista
Communications &
Development
Associate



Shannah Cumberbatch
AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer
& Engagement Associate

And Our Board of Directors.

Elizabeth Curwen, Chair

Justin Lini, Vice Chair

Beth Scott, Secretary

Dana Fronczak, Treasurer

Charles Taylor, At-Large Exec

Committee & Director

Danita Delaney, Director

Rachel Wells, Director

Daniella Einik, Director

John Healey, Director

Kamaile Turčan, Director

Dennis Chestnut, Director

Martha Holley-Miers, Director

Irfana Noorani Jetha, Director

Sonya Weisburd, Director

Building, Listening, Expanding

While Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is often referred to as a “hidden gem” or Washington, DC’s “best kept secret,” Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens believes it should be a highly sought after go-to for park neighbors, resident nature lovers, and tourists from near and far. Our goal every year is to activate this space as a neighborhood resource, ensuring those who live nearby know of and enjoy the beauty, solace, and recreational opportunities the park provides. Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is the perfect place for community members, and residents from across DC, Maryland and Virginia to integrate their daily lives here. We want people to think out of the box and consider visiting the gardens for faith-based events, family outings, club meetings, drum circles, dog walking, mid-day breaks, and so much more. The surrounding beauty that the park offers is the perfect environment for such gatherings - whether as a solo venture or with a group.

Where does Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens come in? Our top three goals are to ensure the park is welcoming, well-maintained and well enjoyed. Our partnership with the National Park Service allows us to understand the needs of the park and its visitors. We bring in resources like programming and activities, volunteer and community service experiences, and assist with infrastructure needs.

In 2021, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was able to build connections with and among our neighbors through well-maintained trails and new signage, culturally enriching events, like the annual Lotus & Water Lily Festival, volunteer service, camps, and the arts. Further, we invested in expanding our organization, adding a community engagement staff person who happens to live in the neighborhood, and is tasked with listening to residents and learning what is needed to get residents to reclaim their neighborhood national park.

“For years I lived in Washington, DC. It was only after I moved away that I discovered Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, this year. A coworker, who is a volunteer, invited me to the annual Lotus and Water Lily festival. I went by myself the first time and met locals, out of towners, and even a couple visiting from Vietnam. I was blown away by the wild, but well manicured natural beauty of it all. Since that time I have returned at least five times with friends, for activities like tai-chi in the park and to explore the walking/biking trails that wind into and around the park. I am hooked and will look for ways that I can volunteer and support this treasure.”

Cheryl Thompson, WELLderness tai chi attendee

Education + Arts = Nature Lovers of All Ages

Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is investing deeply in efforts to build connections with and among our neighbors through trail signage and stewardship, culturally enriching events, like our annual Lotus & Water Lily Festival, volunteer service, camps, and the arts. This year, we set out to better understand and share the impact this park has on people's lives in an authentic and meaningful way. Further, in an effort to increase our relationship with park neighbors and other residents within the footprint of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, we began a campaign to share the benefits of having a national park in one's community to better reflect and uplift the community's stories.



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Education

Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens remained responsive to community needs for both in-person and virtual options for our interactive and engaging spring and summer break camp programming. Over 35 students (and often their families too!) were still able to explore and celebrate the park through hands-on learning stations, at-home project kits, online education sessions, family outings and stewardship projects. We provided three weeks of the Junior Ranger camp, a hybrid camp with both virtual and family events. In addition, to help meet the needs of our families seeking safe out-of-school time, in-person care, we partnered with Urban Adventure Squad to develop an option for full day, in-person camp activities at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens.

Outdoor Wellness

This year, we piloted WELLderness. This outdoor wellness series "in the wilderness" of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was designed for park neighbors to retreat right in their backyard from the impacts of racial injustice and the pandemic experienced in 2021.

Park neighbors were able to appreciate the park's therapeutic nature in new and multiple different ways. Neighbors were also thrilled to have free and opportunities to celebrate and recreate in the park in their neighborhood. Program offerings included yoga, tai chi, forest bathing, dog pack walks, adult art therapy, smartphone photography, and concerts including African drumming and steel drum performances. These sessions helped improve the quality of life - and even helped to extend the life - of our park neighbors and visitors. We are looking forward to continuing this program in years to come.



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© Tim Ervin

Arts in the Park

Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens works to ensure Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens is welcoming and well-enjoyed by neighbors and visitors. While this includes ensuring park ponds are clean for healthy lotus and water lily blooms, it also means bringing in visual and performing arts opportunities which contributes to our collective healing. This year, we delved into a new partnership project to establish a Seasonal Artist in Residence program - Down to Earth - in cooperation with Capital Fringe and Caandor Labs. This program provided four local artists paid opportunities to use their medium to shine a light on the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and the Kenilworth area's past, present, and future with a sharp focus on the climate emergency and its intersectionality with systemic racism.

Also, this year, we brought to Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens its first outdoor art installation. Highlighting the importance of greenspace in communities as a place of respite and resource, especially during the pandemic, *Passage: Reflections on Time & Space* juxtaposed the synthetic and natural beauty of the Gardens to offer visitors a newfound appreciation for green space. Further, the installation challenged viewers to explore access to spaces, privilege, and their own relationship to wild and cultivated green space, issues Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens has committed to address alongside Ward 7 community leaders and residents.



© Caandor Labs



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“I have lived in the Mayfair neighborhood right outside of the Kenilworth Gardens for almost 3 years, and am so grateful to live near such a unique and stunning place. As a young mom of toddlers, the pandemic was very isolating and made for some really long days. The WELLderness series really felt like a turned page in stepping out to take care of my mental health on a deeper level and be out safely in the community again. I met many new neighbors and friends, as well as ran into neighbors I had not seen for quite some time. I’m already looking forward to next year’s series and am so grateful for this wonderful programming.”

Rachael Coad WELLderness attendee and park neighbor

A Well-maintained Aquatic Gardens

Volunteers are a crucial component in maintaining the plants, ponds and trails of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. As such, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens continued to welcome a wide variety of volunteers, including those who put on gloves and even waders to keep the ponds and wetlands healthy, and pedestrian trails safe. We hosted six large volunteer events for the public, as well as numerous events for high school and college students in need of community service hours. **In total, 207 volunteers put in 621 hours at the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens.** Our volunteer friends helped pull hundreds of pounds of invasive aquatic vegetation, removed a shopping cart or two from the Anacostia River, collected more than 130 bags of trash and recycling, and carried out old pieces of fencing from the ponds. Volunteers also lent a hand greeting and orienting park visitors, and assisting with our very first outdoor art installation, lugging materials, stenciling exhibit text and distributing fliers to park neighbors. Unlike 2020, this year, we were able to kickstart volunteering in March as the aquatic plants began to emerge, and we closed out the year in October as the leaves changed color and the lotus died back.



© FoKAG



© Scene by the Heart

"I initially came through here by happenstance and it just so happened a couple years later I ended up moving here and I love the park. I love all the new experiences we are having. I mean, forest bathing, who would have ever thought we would have that in Kenilworth Park. There's so many things we can do here. As a person who lives in the neighborhood, I love that this is happening right in my own backyard and I am happy to share it with anyone else who wants to experience it and who will love it just as much as I do."

Junel Jeffrey, Eastland Gardens Civic Association President and park neighbor.



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Spreading the Good News of the Gardens

In 2021, Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was able to garner media attention on blogs, in local and national newspapers, and local radio and TV news. Our staff and board, collectively, was able to speak on the record to share news about new and recurring programs and activities, in addition to sharing the spotlight with some of our partners and park neighbors.



“This is the perfect time to go to the Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens, which exhibits lotus plants, lilies, and other plants and flowers. News4’s Megan McGrath reports”



Free Art Workshops for Families East of the River

“Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens in collaboration with ArtReach and George Washington University are bringing free fine arts education, therapeutic art, and mixed media art workshops to DC residents East of the River...”

East of the River

OUTDOOR WELLNESS SERIES AT KENILWORTH PARK

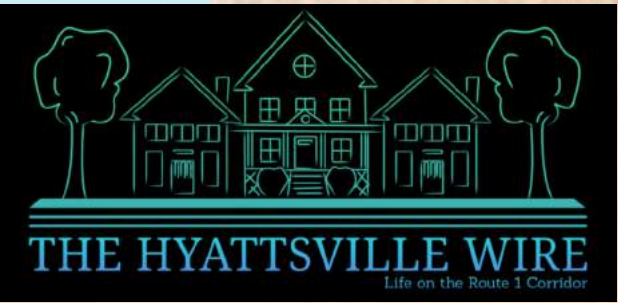


KENILWORTH AQUATIC GARDENS GUIDES FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG KIDS



The Washington Post

“Zerline Hughes Spruill, the community engagement manager for Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, appreciates how the path takes you to a panoramic view of swamp land, the mouth of the Anacostia River, kayakers and the most beautiful birds. It is as if you are taking in a giant water color painting.’ In the morning, when it’s least crowded, she likes to practice yoga there.”



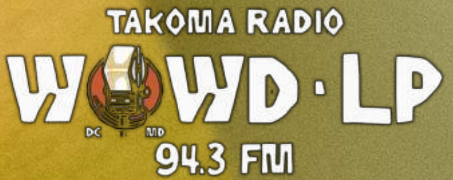
“For those seeking an easy respite close to home, the neighborhood national park we support, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, is the perfect place,” said the nonprofit’s executive director, Tina O’Connell, in a statement. “Fall is always a gorgeous time to visit and this year, for a limited time, visitors can engage with a new, experiential outdoor art installation that can help us heal and cope from past and current stresses.”

FIND YOUR **CHESAPEAKE**



“It’s almost peak bloom at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens! Join us for the 2021 Virtual Lotus and Water Lily Festival”

Also featured in:



Celebrating a Well-maintained, Well-enjoyed, and Welcoming Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

Friends of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens spent 2021 answering the needs of neighbors, visitors, volunteers and staff, ensuring our vision to connect people to the park.



Bringing back the Lotus and Lily Festival as an in-person and virtual convening.

With partnership from National Capital Parks-East, we provided in-person activities throughout the month-long celebration, including late-opening Fridays in July featuring wellness and arts events, in addition to online programming including an opening ceremony hosted by ANC 7D02 Commissioner Siraaj Hasan.



Raising \$125,000 to begin the installation of new signage and pet waste stations to the park and surrounding neighborhood.

Thanks to our supporters and funding from the DC Department of Transportation, we were able to raise funds to update and install signs located at both entrances to the park, a directional sign in the neighborhood, and a new Visitor Center sign. Educational wayside exhibits and pet waste stations, too, will be added in early 2022.



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Providing in-person and virtual camp experiences for local youth.

This year we provided a total of 3 free weeks of virtual camp for more than 35 students to explore the park during Spring and Summer break, and piloted a new in-person Junior Ranger Adventure Squad program with Urban Adventure Squad.



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Welcoming neighbors and visitors.

We provided a welcome station for visitors during the spring and summer season to answer visitor questions, and engage young ones with scavenger hunts and other educational activities, including our very own “life cycle of a lotus” game.

Reinstituting concerts in the park.

As part of a pilot program, we hosted the East of the River Steel Drum Band and Bele Bele Rhythm Collective to offer outdoor concerts to visitors seeking opportunities to enjoy music and participate in interactive performances.



© FoKAG



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We piloted for five months WELLderness: An Outdoor Wellness Series targeting our Ward 7 neighbors, featuring free therapeutic arts, fitness and nature activities for the entire family.

Sessions included tai chi, forest bathing, yoga, live music, therapeutic art, smartphone photography.



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Committing organization-wide to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

This year, our organization increased its diverse staff and team of volunteers. We received the results of our organizational DEI review, conducted by a 3rd party consultant, created a DEI committee, updated our Value statements that guide our work, and are being intentional about inclusivity in our programming, messaging and relationships.

Celebrating a Welcoming, Well-Maintained and Well-Enjoyed Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens



Adopting a land acknowledgement statement in partnership with an enrolled member of the Piscataway Conoy.

The statement is now available on our website and featured during Friends of Aquatic Gardens events, further expressing our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



Expanding our Photo Contest.

We enhanced our photo contest to a free, monthly opportunity for park visitors to submit their creative photographs for publication on all our platforms.

Introducing arts and arts partnerships.

We curated the park’s very first outdoor art exhibit entitled *Passage: Reflections on Time & Space* which honed in on the importance of greenspace in communities as a place of respite and resource, particularly during the pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

We created a seasonal artist-in-residence program, called Down to Earth, in partnership with Capital Fringe and Caandor Labs to shine a light on Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and the Kenilworth area’s past, present, and future with a sharp focus on the climate emergency and its intersectionality with systemic racism.



“It has to do with wellness, stress relief. It's my preferred setting for exercise. I'm in touch with spirituality, God and divinity when I’m in nature. It is my quiet, reflective time. I think greenspace is underutilized in D.C. We have a lot of it, but for reasons I'm not sure of, it has been underutilized by us.”

Loteena Wolters, park neighbor and regular Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens visitor



Friends of Kenilworth
AQUATIC GARDENS
2021 Year in Review

207

volunteers engaged



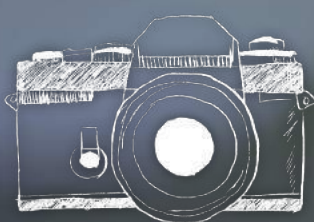
29

WELLderness outdoor wellness
sessions for visitors and
the community alike



218

photos submitted in
our photo contest



80

wheelbarrows of
invasive species
removed



39

kids engaged in
our free summer camp



5

new signs at the park
with 6 waysides &
2 pet waste stations
on the way



1

art installation
at the park



6

videos produced for the
virtual Lotus & Water
Lily Festival



621

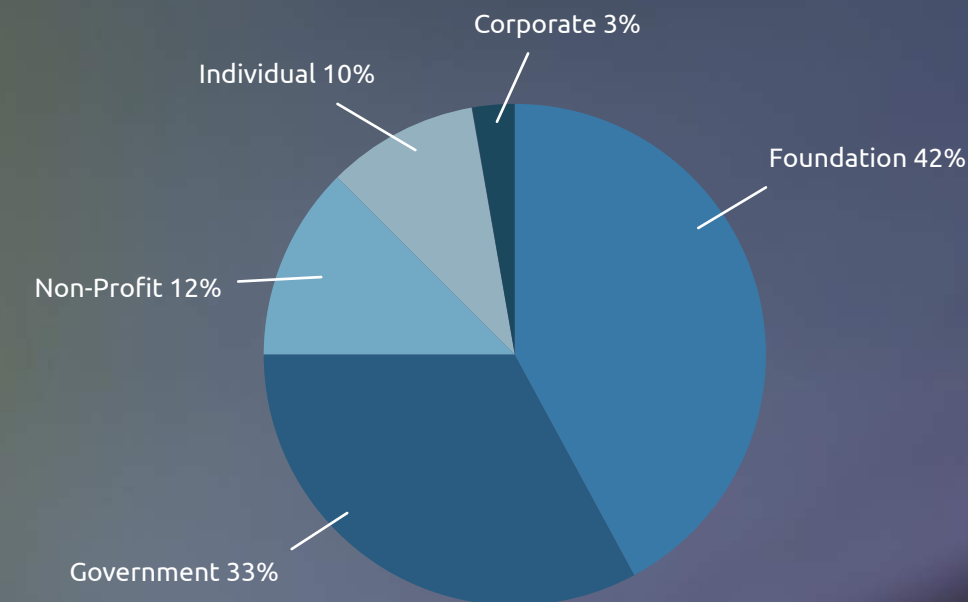
volunteer hours



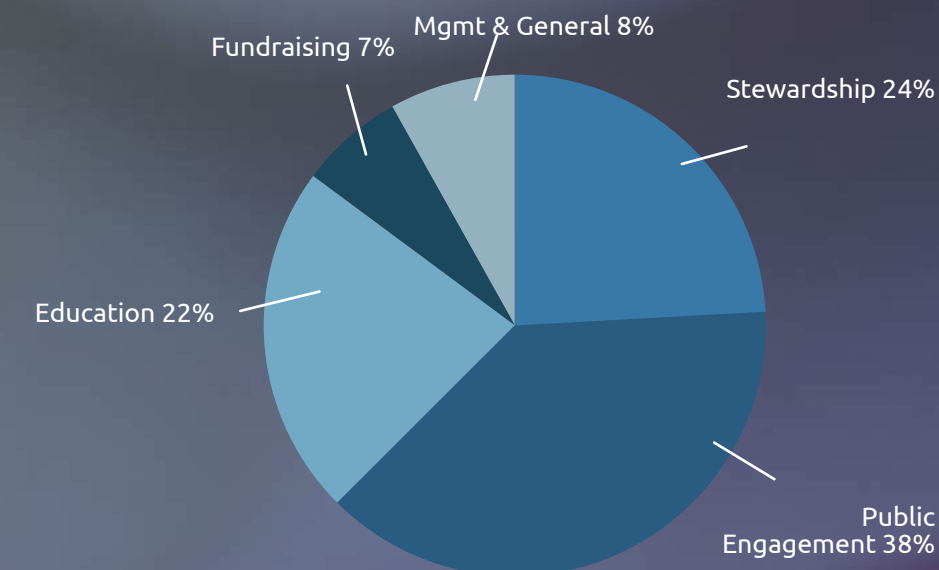
By The Numbers

2021 Preliminary Financials*

Revenue		
Foundation	158,000.00	42%
Government	126,250.00	38%
Non-Profit	47,000.00	12%
Individual	36,748.00	10%
Corporate	10,247.00	3%
Total Income	378,244.25	100%



Expenses		
Stewardship	76,562.00	24%
Public Engagement	120,616.00	38%
Education	70,657.00	22%
Fundraising	20,686.00	7%
Mgmt & General	26,670.00	8%
Total Expense	315,191.00	100%



*Audited financials available in July 2022.

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Friends of Kenilworth
AQUATIC GARDENS

A proud partner of the National Park Service



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kenaqgardens.org

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