



GATHER ROUND

**A year of discovery, connection,
and community**

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends,



At Quarry Hill Nature Center, much of our work begins with a simple invitation: “Gather round.” It’s the excited call our naturalists give when a new discovery is made—a frog hiding in pond muck, a spider spinning its web, or a leaf unlike any they’ve seen before. It’s the moment curiosity sparks, questions bloom, and learning happens together.

This past year, that “gather round” spirit rippled far beyond our student programs. We saw it in our new Mindfulness Walks, where visitors of all ages paused to breathe and share a quiet moment of connection with the woods. We saw it online, too, as our community gathered for our “12 Days of Nature” series over the winter break, where naturalist Cheryl demonstrated simple, hands-on ways to connect with the wild right in your own backyard.

And sometimes, we gathered for the sheer, quirky fun of it, like our “Duck Days of Winter.” Watching families scour the Exploration Hall for hidden rubber duckies (while learning that Minnesota is a vital stopover for 40+ species of wild ducks!) reminded us that nature education is at its best when it’s an adventure.

Nowhere was that spirit more visible last year than at our Party on the Prairie gala. We watched a new group of Gala Ambassadors—parents, longtime supporters, and even adults who once roamed these trails as “Quarry Hill Kids”—step forward to gather their own circles around the Nature Center. They brought friends and neighbors to share stories, laughter, and a deep-rooted love for this place. **As the evening unfolded, the tent filled with an unmistakable sense of belonging. A widening circle of people connected by the belief that nature should remain accessible, inspiring, and protected for everyone, now and for generations to come.**

In every program, event, and casual hike, Quarry Hill is where our community comes together. Because of your support, these moments of discovery continue to grow. **This report celebrates what we make possible together and the many ways our community continues to gather round.**

With sincere gratitude,

Pamela Meyer | Executive Director

Michael Willard | Board President

DISCOVERY

Curiosity is the starting point for every discovery.

At Quarry Hill, students and visitors learn by exploring the natural world firsthand. They investigate ecosystems, meet live animals, examine fossils, and uncover the stories written in Minnesota's landscapes.

Our educators create opportunities for learners of all ages to ask questions, make observations, and experience science in action. Every program is an opportunity to deepen understanding and build lasting connections with the natural world. These moments add up to something powerful: a community inspired to care for and connect with the natural world.

In collaboration with Hawthorne Family Literacy Program, we brought nature into a space where children and caregivers learned side by side.

Each visit was a shared experience, listening to a story, meeting a live animal, and exploring something new together. Whether encountering an owl, a turtle, or a snake, children and parents alike leaned in with curiosity. In these moments, nature becomes a common language—one that invites questions, sparks conversation, and strengthens connection with nature and with each other.

At the end of eight weeks, families took their learning experience outdoors with a visit to Quarry Hill for a guided birdwatching experience.



28,372

Total Participants
Nature-Based Learning
Experiences

in 2025 our
outreach programs
increased by

53%

GATHER ROUND

Quarry Hill is more than a destination; it's a community gathering place.

Folks come together here for moments of learning and joy. Members, volunteers, and supporters with a shared passion for nature contribute to our vision: ensuring that meaningful nature experiences are accessible to everyone.

A community that stepped forward in a remarkable way.

At Party on the Prairie gala, supporters gathered to celebrate the Nature Center and invest in its future.

In a powerful moment of shared generosity, **138 donors stepped forward to contribute more than \$119,000** — over half of the **\$208,000 raised** that evening, reflecting a deep commitment to Quarry Hill.



Increasing access to nature experiences is a priority at Quarry Hill.

Corporate and foundation support allowed us to offer more free programming in 2025,

increasing participation by **42%**

2,350 participants enjoyed no-cost nature experiences with our talented team of naturalists.

From weekly Sunday programs to seasonal pop-up events, nature offers something for everyone.

CONNECTION

Nature invites us to slow down and reconnect.

Nature is a common denominator. The common ground on which we connect with ourselves and each other. It's an open invitation to spend a few minutes or a few days – and that is the best part – nature is always there for us.

Whether exploring miles of trails or attending a naturalist-led program, people gathered at Quarry Hill to connect with themselves and with each other.



This past fall, our “gather round” invitation extended to colleagues from across the state when we hosted the pre-conference field trip for the Minnesota Naturalists’ Association Conference.

50 naturalists gathered at Quarry Hill to dive into the heart of our work before joining 125 peers at Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center for a full weekend of learning.

From the quiet awe of our 35-year-old bird-banding program to the ancient history etched into our limestone quarry, conference participants experienced the deep intentionality and science that define our work.

Hosting this gathering was a powerful reminder that our “circle” at Quarry Hill includes not just our local students and families, but a vibrant professional community dedicated to the wild places of Minnesota and our shared work in the field of environmental education.

With support from the Charles and Marlys Elliot Foundation, we introduced

Mindfulness in Nature Experiences

to encourage participants to pause, breathe, and experience nature in a new way, noticing the small wonders that often go unseen.

Certified guides led these sensory-based practices that nurture relaxation, presence, and emotional resilience. Participants discover the power of slowing down and connecting with nature, themselves, and each other.

“

This was exactly what I needed after a busy week, such a calm, relaxing morning. Neat to connect with people I’d never met.

FINANCIALS

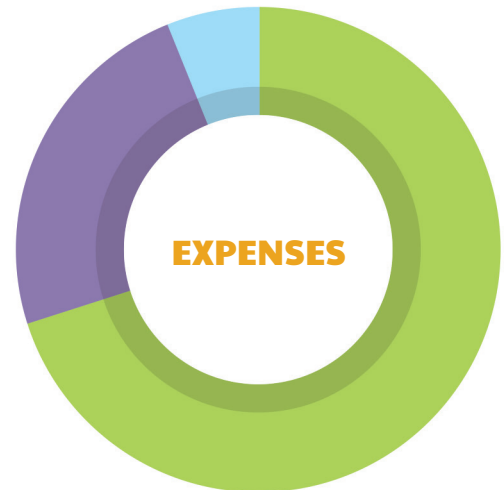
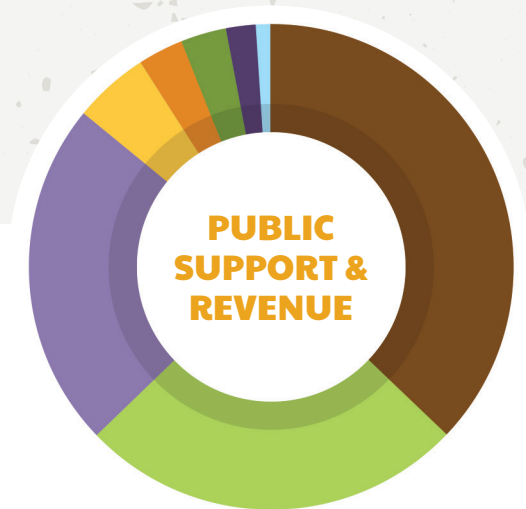
Friends of Quarry Hill Nature Center financial statements are audited annually by an independent certified public accountant. Detailed audited financials are available on our website.

PUBLIC SUPPORT & REVENUE — \$903,029

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| ● Educational Programs & Events | 37% |
| ● Contributions & Grants | 25% |
| ● Fundraising Gala | 23% |
| ● Contract Services | 5% |
| ● Interest & Dividends | 3% |
| ● Endowment | 3% |
| ● Rentals | 2% |
| ● Merchandise Sales | 1% |

EXPENSES — \$745,648

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| ● Program & Event Services | 70% |
| ● General & Administrative | 24% |
| ● Fundraising | 6% |



Many thanks to our community of supporters.

875

Members

290

Volunteers



4,309

Hours volunteered

Corporate Giving Program:

Think Bank • Mayo Clinic
Lakeside Dentistry
Luther Park Place Motors

Foundations:

Charles and Marlys Elliot Foundation
Michael Noll Foundation
Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation
Rochester Area Foundation



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Connect with us online!