



VERMONT *Nature*

SPRING/SUMMER 2017

The Beginning of VINS *By Jillien Graye and Collette Reynolds*



Ottauquechee River - Quechee Gorge

For nearly 13,000 years, the Ottauquechee River has provided for countless plant and animal species, facilitating their evolution and adaptation. For humans, the Ottauquechee has served as a source of food, fuel, manufacturing, travel, and recreation – it has been and continues to be an invaluable resource.

However, 45 years ago, the Ottauquechee River was in trouble; its waters and shores had become heavily degraded by pollution rendering it unsafe for both wildlife and people. At this juncture, a group of concerned Vermonters joined together to save and preserve this ancient watershed for future generations.

A Solution to a Problem

In 1970, a co-founder of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, David Laughlin, D.D.S., initiated a study surveying pollutants in areas including Woodstock, Bridgewater, Pomfret and

Quechee. After the struggle to clean up the river and considered what could have been done differently, the co-founders thought of a way to better aid in the efforts of sustainability – to create an environmental organization aimed to educate children about the natural world. Under the leadership of co-founders David Laughlin, Sally Laughlin, June McKnight, and Richard Farrar, a group of determined individuals furthered their pursuit and VINS was born on October of 1972.

Core Ingredients

Sally and Richard had been practicing bird banding at the time of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science's founding. The practices of environmental education, ornithological research, and river work became the stepping stones of VINS. Soon after, the implementation of ELF programs (Environmental Learning for the Future) began, later receiving the Governor's Award for Distinguished Service to Children and Youth. Former Interim Director and author of *Hands-On Nature*, Jenepher Lingelbach was key to the education component of VINS. Under Jen's direction, VINS began to engage audiences by traveling to local schools and communities. She later expanded her reach throughout regions of Vermont and New Hampshire; her work soon become a wonderful source of promoting natural science education to all ages.

Growth and Development

As ELF and research developed, and the organization headquarters grew, people began to bring injured birds to VINS. As the organization outgrew its facility in Woodstock, Vermont, a raptor center was envisioned and new locations were sought out. Quechee, Vermont, was an ideal prospect located near the Quechee Gorge and State Park. This new forty-seven acre property proved to be the perfect space for VINS' new home. In 2003, the Nature Center was constructed. Having access to forests and nature trails, thousands of visitors were introduced to the many wonders of Vermont's landscape.

Today...

Since its founding, VINS has made an impact by rehabilitating thousands of wild birds, contributing to ornithological research, as well as educating countless members of the public and school-children throughout Vermont, New Hampshire and beyond.

This October, we invite our friends and supporters to celebrate the 45th anniversary of VINS. Looking forward to the next forty-five years, we will continue to connect those who share a passion for the environment and to build the next generation of environmental stewards.



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(1918 - 2017)

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A Special Message

From Our Executive Director

As we prepare to celebrate our 45th Anniversary this October, we are pleased to share with you our vision for the future as we remember and celebrate our past.

Since 1972, VINS has educated generations of environmental stewards, undertaken dozens of scientific research projects, rehabilitated countless raptors and songbirds, instilled a sense of wonder in more than one million people, and provided children a chance to experience the natural world.

Accomplishments

Last summer, the new Forest Exhibit opened highlighting the sights, sounds, and smells of a natural forest. With a 7-foot diameter model tree reaching 16-feet high, this exhibit creates an immersive experience for all ages. This spring, a slide will be added, where young visitors can exit the exhibit and slide to the forest floor.

The popular exhibit, Birds Are Dinosaurs, will relaunch this spring. As visitors dig for dinosaur fossils, interact with life-sized replicas, and explore with hands-on activities, they will find the answer to the question of whether dinosaurs are still alive today.

In the past three years, the number of visitors to the Nature Center has grown from 24,000 to nearly 37,000, an increase of fifty-four percent. This February, the Owl Festival drew a record of 2,455 participants. Our goal is to develop the Nature Center to enhance the experience and engage visitors more fully in the natural world by encouraging lifelong caring for nature.

Milestones of this anniversary year include the winterization of the Pavilion. This meeting space will be available in mid-April for a variety of programs including: raptor encounters, science, and arts.

Also, VINS School Programs continues to grow, increasing by forty-one percent.

In the upcoming months, we will be introducing a new dimension of outdoor play to the Nature Center, a nature's playscape. Here, children will explore fallen logs; leap and balance; climb and swing on branches in a safe space designed to create a memorable and fun experience.



VINS Pavilion - Winterization Project in 2017

As we work to provide a more enhanced experience to nurture the next generation of environmental stewards, we appreciate the efforts of devoted friends who share a like-minded goal.

With Gratitude

It is with sadness that we convey the news that June McKnight, a co-founder of VINS, passed away in late February. Her contribution to the founding of VINS and her presence over the years has been instrumental in VINS reaching its 45th Anniversary.

Another important friend of VINS passed away last December, Peter Rosengarten. The Rosengartens were vital supporters during VINS' relocation to Quechee – they have since been devoted to VINS and its mission.

VINS' co-founder Sally Laughlin once said, "It was the people who believed in it, who made it happen."

To you, our remarkable supporters and volunteers, we would like to graciously thank you.

Because of your important contributions and passion, we are able to continue our work to lead the way in environmental education. We look forward to seeing you at the Nature Center this spring!

Sincerely,

Charles F. Rattigan
Executive Director

VINS Volunteer

Behind-the-Scenes with Betsy Smith

Being a volunteer at VINS has been a wonderful opportunity to get close to some fascinating wildlife and to get to know the amazing people who care for them with such dedication and enthusiasm.

This year, I was thrilled to be able to start training in bird-on-glove techniques with Troy, one of the educational Barred Owls. So far, I think he knows more about it than I do, but I'm making good progress, thanks to my trainer, Nicole Meyer, a VINS Education Intern.

As an artist, I've been delighted to participate in two of the en Plein Air Painting Festivals at VINS. It's quite an exhilarating experience to join with other artists in not only painting the landscape, but also setting up our easels near the bird enclosures and painting the beautiful raptors.



Betsy with Troy, VINS' resident Barred Owl

I recently tried my hand at face-painting during the Owl Festival held in February. The young children were definitely fun and challenging to work with. I'm not used to having my artwork respond to me by squinting, squirming, and giggling! — *Betsy Smith*



Volunteer today! Visit us at vinsweb.org/volunteer

VINS in the Classroom

By Hannah Gelroth

Many people think of VINS as 'the bird place' with its uniquely beautiful Nature Center and captivating birds; however, VINS also has a long history of bringing quality science instruction to area schools.

VINS School Programs strive to nurture and inspire inquisitive, scientifically literate and engaged citizens by providing embedded teacher professional development and direct instruction in Pre-K through 8th grade science classrooms. Last year, VINS worked with PEER Associates, a professional teacher evaluation firm, to assess the impact of our school programs. We focused, in particular, on our ELF (Environmental Learning for the Future) Science Program, which serves teachers and students, grades K-5.

Based on the findings, we are proud to announce that VINS is having a positive impact on school communities in Vermont and New Hampshire. According to one principal, "Our students' knowledge of science has improved and it shows up in our science NECAP scores." We recognize the need to teach in authentic ways that are not compartmentalized. VINS Science Educators are skilled in integrating science in each discipline. One teacher commented, "...the nice thing about VINS is their depth of knowledge and resources to support several science topics."

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June McKnight

1918-2017

VINS Co-founder

As a dedicated conservationist and supporter of environmental education, June McKnight, who peacefully passed at the age of 99, was an instrumental co-founder of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science.

June McKnight spent much of her life as a resident of Woodstock, Vermont before her days in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. As well as being a dedicated conservationist, Mrs. McKnight had an impressive passion for horses, which led to her becoming a very successful breeder of Thoroughbreds. Mrs. McKnight's horses won a respective number of editions of the Prix de 'Arc de Triomphe (Fr-G1) as well as the Maryland Hunt Cup twice, along with several other accomplishments.

June McKnight's advocacy of the environment has left an indelible mark in the community, including the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. Four years ago, VINS dedicated an interpretive nature trail in honor of Mrs. McKnight. We invite all to visit the VINS Nature Center and enjoy the beautiful McKnight Nature Trail. This trail will serve as a reminder of the importance of partnerships among like-minded individuals who work toward a common purpose – to build awareness of the human impact on the natural world.



VINS in the Classroom

(continued from page 3)

Teachers and principals alike recognize one of the signature features of the ELF Science Program: flexibility. We work closely with classroom teachers to make sure that our lessons align with curriculum and their learning goals. VINS Science Educators provide resources, scientific equipment and expertise, and work collaboratively with teachers to develop meaningful and high-quality instruction aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards. This is one of the many reasons principals sign up for VINS School Programs. A principal remarked, "One of the strengths of the [ELF Science program] right now is its flexibility to meet my school's needs. We can go to them and problem solve. It's not a canned program. That flexibility is huge."

Our embedded professional development builds teacher capacity. When we partner with schools, we become an integral part of the science instruction



Michelle Amato, M.Ed., Science Educator and Hannah Gelroth, M.Ed., Director, Center for Environmental Education

happening in the classroom. VINS Science Educators serve as a reliable resource for teachers, and we provide authentic, engaging lessons for students. "The VINS staff are a very valuable resource for me and my classes....They really care about teachers," commented another teacher. As one principal put it, "I like that VINS sends someone to our school to co-plan with the teachers around topics where they need expertise. They collaborate

with the teachers and model how to teach lessons with the goal that teachers develop their own capacity."

Interested in learning more about VINS School Programs and the impact we are having on teachers and students throughout the area? Contact Hannah Gelroth, Director, Center for Environmental Education, at hgelroth@vinsweb.org.



Upcoming Events *Visit us at the VINS Nature Center*

SPRING

April 22

Earth Day Celebration

May 20

17th Annual Chang Memorial Event

May 21

Photo Workshop with Rob Strong

June 10

Get Outdoors Day; Forest Fairy Hunts & House Building

June 19

First Day of Nature Camp!

View our full event schedule:
vinsweb.org/calendar

SUMMER

July 15

Forest Fairy Hunts

July 22

Magnificent Mammals Day

August 12 & 26

Forest Fairy Hunts

August 13

4th Annual Incredible Insect Festival

FALL

September 30 - October 6

3rd Annual en Plein Air Festival

October 2 - 26

Online Silent Auction

November 29

Giving Tuesday

VINS Nature Camp Pre-K to 8th Grade



Locations in Quechee,
South Pomfret, Washington, VT
and Hanover, NH

Discounts Available!

Contact us at 802.359.5000
or camps@vinsweb.org
vinsweb.org/nature-camp