

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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KALAMAZOO NATURE CENTER





# Setting the Stage for What Comes Next



It's an honor to address the KNC community for the first time since being named interim president and CEO on September 1. Like many long-time Kalamazoo residents, my first visit to the Nature Center came during an elementary school field trip. Looking at KNC through new eyes as an adult and nonprofit leader has been a wonderful learning experience. I've met most of our nearly 70 staff and visited our Nature's Way Preschool and Heronwood Field Station. My biggest takeaway so far? I'm astounded by the remarkable talent pool and natural resources that we have. As a beloved local institution and destination for outdoor recreation, KNC has few peers in the Lower Peninsula. While I have yet to hike all 14 miles of our trail network, I've seen enough to know why Kalamazoo's heartfelt connections to KNC run deep. There's an unparalleled sense of beauty and wonder here that hooks people for life.

Nonetheless, as with any modern nonprofit, KNC has its share of challenges. And, I'm no stranger to those: I've been executive director of Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity and Ministry with Community, Inc. with other stops along the way. I've found that there's no single solution for balancing a nonprofit's mission with the need to grow and sustain its operations. Still, I'm eager to help determine what that might look like for KNC. During my time here, I'll work closely with our board and staff to make KNC more resilient, fiscally sound, attractive to visitors and accessible to people of all abilities and backgrounds. I believe that taking these steps together is the best way to prepare for a new president/CEO in 2024.

Sincerely,

**ROB OAKLEAF**  
Interim President & CEO



< *KNC's Headwaters Trail by Jim Triezenberg*

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## Welcome to New Board Members



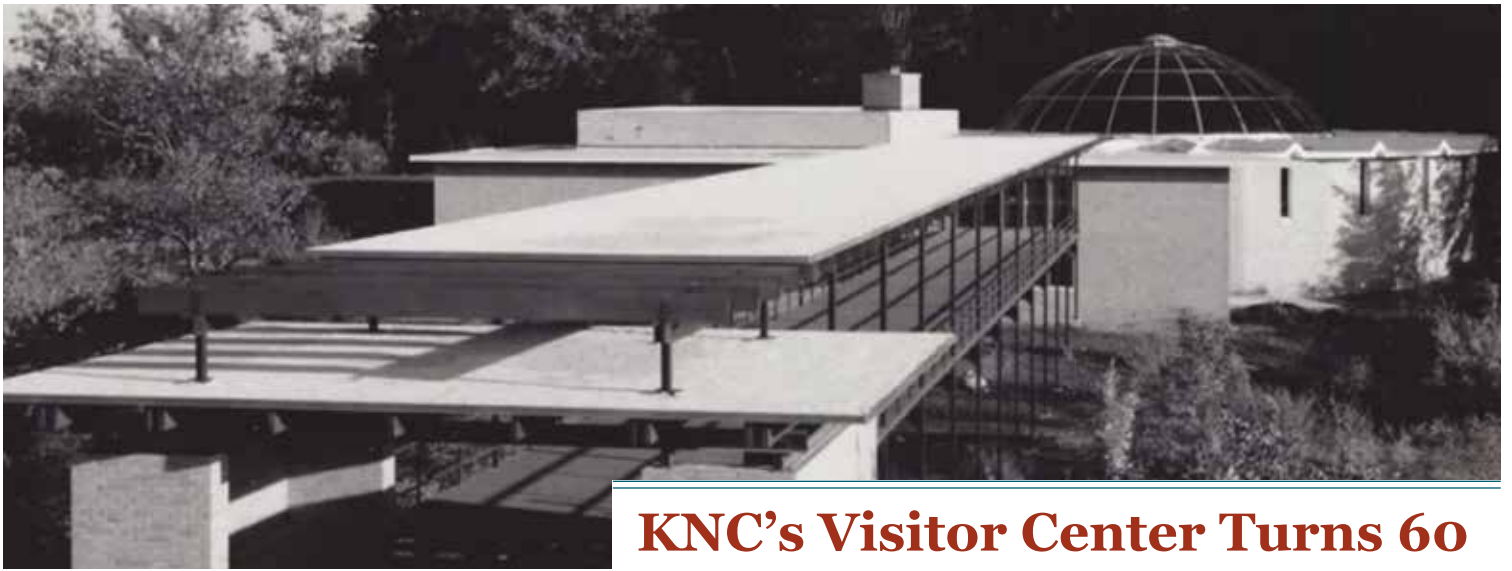
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## KNC's Visitor Center Turns 60

Long-awaited Visitor Center renovations are now underway, thanks to a generous grant from the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation. The marks the largest VC renovation that the Nature Center has undertaken since the late 1990s. The most visible upgrades so far have been to the outside. Crews from H&H Painting have repainted the soffit and fascia around the entire building. The bright white paint provides a welcome fresh look.

The exterior work also involves repainting the steel railing and post supports for the Tree Top deck and Visitor Center bridge. The now orange-red girders and railing – reminiscent of the Golden Gate Bridge – are part of the building's original palette, as designed by architect Alden B. Dow. The plan here is to restore the bridge's deck to its natural wood finish, as seen in early photos.

Inside, staff will soon work with an interior designer to pick the right flooring to cover the exhibit area, Glen Vista Gallery and building entrances. The designer will help us choose a durable surface that reflects the mid-century modern design aesthetic of this historic building. Since the floor may last 25 years, it's best to choose wisely! KNC has decided on a new flooring choice for the classroom, and new lighting for the exhibit area. Staff will seek to choose light fixtures that provide better illumination and adhere to the building's architectural heritage. We are excited to watch as a new sparkle is added to this iconic building, just in time to celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> year.

## Paul Manstrom Retires from Board – but his Contributions Continue



While KNC board member Paul Manstrom will step down from his trustee position on December 31, his service to the organization will continue. He has agreed to serve as sustainability coordinator for a \$265,000 grant that KNC received in August from the Michigan Public Service Commission.

"Paul has extensive experience with renewable energy, both in his role as an energy analyst with Andy J. Egan Company and as associate vice president for management at Kalamazoo College," said Dr. Denise Keele, KNC board chair. "He's an ideal candidate to help manage the low carbon grant, given his detailed knowledge of KNC's mechanical and solar generation systems."

The MPSC grant is officially known as the Low Carbon Energy Infrastructure Planning project. This effort will serve as a roadmap for KNC as it pursues its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2035. When complete, the plan will help guide the construction of renewable energy infrastructure at the Nature Center. Along with the plan's engineering and design elements, it will include an educational component to advance KNC's mission of education and public outreach. The plan's key elements will:

- Expand on-site Renewable Energy Capacity (primarily through new solar arrays on the main campus)
- Develop an on-site energy storage unit to minimize renewable energy outflow to the utility grid
- Create a plan to convert KNC's service fleet from gasoline and diesel engines to propane and electric-powered vehicles
- Reduce Scope 3 emissions attributable to KNC operations by installing up to eight EV charging stations on-site
- Develop educational and interactive exhibits to showcase technologies (sensors, data displays, etc.) that track energy use and production in ways clearly visible to staff and visitors

*Paul Manstrom, above, helped with the recent installation of a new solar array at Heronwood Field Station. >*







## New Mews for KNC's Birds of Prey

Chester the broad-winged hawk is one of KNC's younger birds. Broad-winged hawks prefer nesting near forest openings and a body of water. They avoid human disturbance. They look for food in meadows and wetlands. When you visit Chester for a program, you also learn a bit about the conservation and restoration of the habitats on which Chester's broad-winged clan depends.

Behind the scenes of our animal ambassadors' program is the work of providing the highest level of care for the avian members of our team. We only welcome birds who are able to live a healthy life but are injured and deemed non-releasable. While they are with us, we strive to support their well-being from both a physical, mental, and social-emotional perspective.

Population declines, habitat protection, and species extinction are at the heart of KNC's Animal Ambassador education. The Birds of Prey are an important part of our work as it relates to local animal relatives and their habitat, offering a connection to place, and pathways toward better local habitat stewardship.

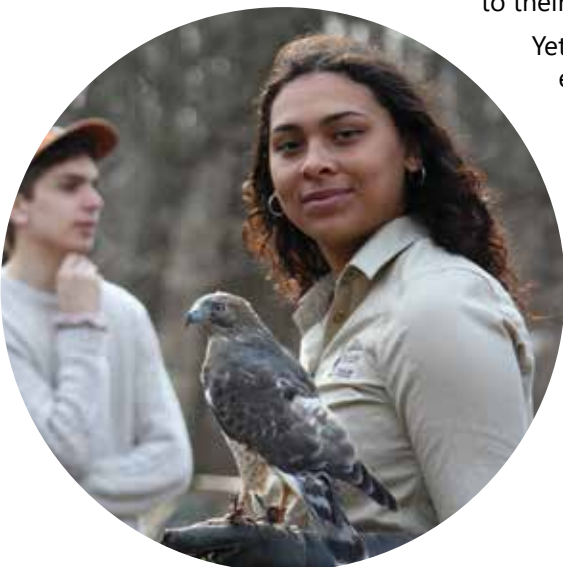
Through work with the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators (IAATE), we have updated our training approach to include the latest research in caring for the social and emotional health of Birds of Prey. As research provides new information, we will adapt our care and animal housing. A highlight of 2023 is the completion of six new large spaces for our birds. They offer a much larger area for our birds and follow new and coming standards for space requirements, enclosure mesh, lumber type, and better ceiling and flooring materials and design to eliminate the risk of potential breach of enclosures by predators. They also include room for expansion when we are ready to add to our team of ambassadors. Our birds are visibly happier and respond better to training and companionship with our staff support team. You will see increased programming with our birds in the coming months and years as they get acclimated to their space and continue learning with our BOP training staff.

Yet to come is a plan for a visually appealing fence line around our enclosures to remind our visitors to give a safe and comfortable distance for our birds. We will add native landscaping, signage, and trail access for an optimal experience in this vibrant new home for the birds.

Special thanks to our strong team of animal ambassador volunteers who have helped care for our birds and keep their needs at the core of our decision-making during this move.

< *Animal Care Manager Cheyenne Gandy and Chester the broad-winged hawk at last year's Maple Sugar Festival program.*

^ *Visit the birds in their new home located in the KNC Arboretum!*





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## Michigan Motus Project Expands



KNC's Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory (KVBO) works with bird observatories around the globe to gather data on bird migration routes using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. Led by Bird Studies Canada, this system uses networked receiving towers to detect specialized radio tracking devices on wildlife from up to 15 kilometers away and shares these reports with researchers worldwide. At this time, the KVBO operates towers at both KNC and the Pitsfield banding station, while also working closely with 17 other statewide Motus receivers that make up the Michigan Motus Array. Together with other international receivers, this network dramatically increases researchers' abilities to track bird migration across Michigan and beyond.

As of late September, a new Motus wildlife tracking tower is in place near the sixth hole at Ann Arbor's Huron Hills Golf Course. This receiver location now completes a dedicated line of antennas from east to west across southern Michigan, which should allow researchers to track the movements of any tagged birds that are migrating north or south within the state. Nearby, it will also help inform habitat management in Ann Arbor's natural areas. In its short time of activity, the tower at Huron Hills Golf Course has already made five detections, including the state-threatened Eastern Whip-poor-will and the state-endangered Kirtland's Warbler.

Since 2018, the data from Michigan Motus Array has provided over 170 confirmed bird observations, contributing to at least 25 different research projects that help us learn more about the migratory behavior and survival of wildlife. At the moment, 34 countries are participating in this worldwide effort, sharing data between over 1,800 receiver stations like the new one in Ann Arbor. Anyone can follow the daily tracking activity of this tower or any others in the network online at [motus.org/explore](https://motus.org/explore). Or, see highlights from last year's Michigan Motus activity at [naturecenter.org/motus](https://naturecenter.org/motus).

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## KNC Rentals Program Invites People to Nature

The invitation to reconnect with nature sometimes can indeed be an invitation – to a wedding, a birthday party, a memorial luncheon, or a company retreat. Life's biggest moments unfold here surrounded by the beauty of our natural world. The opportunity to provide the space for these gatherings is an honor and a testament to KNC's role in the lives of the people in our community who have chosen to host their events here - and to their deeply rooted connections to nature. For guests, these times of vows, tears, and cheers become opportunities for reflection and reconnection to the natural world. Molly reflected on the memorial she held for her mother here at KNC this year, "Guests mentioned the view into the forest made everyone feel lighter and focused on life ... a reminder of that life and death are the natural order, a reminder of divine order, of life beyond."

When our community gathers together here, among the forests and fields, nature is at the heart of the gathering. Nature's invitation is a meaningful way Kalamazoo Nature Center fulfills our mission to create relationships and experiences that inspire people to discover, enjoy, value, and care for nature.



## 2022-23 Numbers



**Total Revenues**  
**\$3,969,614**

● Endowment Income	24%
● Contributions and Grants	34%
● Tuition and Program Fees	34%
● Memberships	4%
● Rental Income	3%
● Admissions and Special Events	1%
● Retail Operations	1%



**Expenditures**  
**\$4,270,698**

● Learning & Engagement	34%
● Conservation Stewardship	20%
● Member/Visitor Services	4%
● Administration	21%
● Facilities Management	11%
● Development	10%

**Net Deficit** **\$301,084**

## Numbers At a Glance

**5,673**

KNC Members

**4,646**

Birds banded at Kalamazoo  
Valley Bird Observatory

**774**

Acres of habitat managed at  
KNC and client properties by  
KNC Ecological Services

**8,364/400**

Individual butterflies/surveys  
for Michigan Butterfly Network  
butterfly monitoring

**17/140**

Volunteer land stewardship  
events/stewardship volunteers

**944/\$9,329**

KNC Campers/fincial assistance  
for Camp awarded

**119**

Nature's Way Preschool  
enrollment

**109**

Community Supported  
Agriculture U-Pick shareholders  
at DeLano Farms

**97/4,340**

Facility rentals/guests

**358/2,435**

Volunteers/volunteer hours

**134/1,821**

Public programs/participants

**1,889**

School program participants

**44/10**

Heronwood student enrollment/  
Youth Climate Leaders

**16,796/4,767**

Facebook/Instagram followers  
as of August 31

**26,526**

Google Interactions

**73,961**

Website visits (NatureCenter.org)

## Southwest Michigan's Cultural Membership Exchange



1,667 KNC members enjoyed free admission  
to the participating organizations,  
and 621 partner members visited KNC  
in October, 2022.



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