



# Fiddleheads and Feathers



The Newsletter of the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation, Ltd.

Fall 2012

## Greetings and Happy Harvest!

We hope you are well during this harvest season. With this newsletter, we announce the launch of our new website! The original site was designed by Melinda's long-time friend Peter Hack, who is also a gifted musician\*. It provided information on our programs to people all across the world. However, it is time for new enhancements. We hope to reach more educators and increase visits by new and old friends alike. Please take a look at [www.mgaef.org](http://www.mgaef.org).

The MGAEF continues with its core programs:

(1) environmental curricula grants, (2) support for students to study ecology and environmental science and (3) a scholarship

for a worthy SUNY-ESF student. In this newsletter, we are excited to report on three wonderful curricular grants, all with an international focus coincidentally in Belize, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

Please consider us when you make your charitable donations this year. Our funds directly benefit many projects both close to home in Western New York and also worldwide.

*Daniel Ardia, President*

\*To hear Peter's music, visit <http://soundcloud.com/peter-hack/sets/mysongs>.

## Our Featured Teacher

**Joanne Tronolone**, a middle school teacher at Buffalo Public School #81, embodies Melinda's teaching ideas and values. We have had the privilege of interacting with Joanne for two years, and sending several of her students to DEC Camp Rushford. Here is a recent letter from Joanne.



Ms. Tronolone's students investigate wetlands at The Iroquois National Refuge.

Joanne, keep up the great work! We hope to meet and support more teachers like you. To nominate a science teacher to be featured in our next MGAEF Newsletter, please email us at [info@mgaef.org](mailto:info@mgaef.org).

Dear MGAEF,

*Thank you so much for allowing the opportunity for two more great kids to participate in your summer camp program! I, too, feel strongly about teaching students at a young age about the magnificence and frailty of the earth. This is truly a wonderful offering to disadvantaged students, in Melinda's memory.*

*My favorite earth science unit is creating self-sustaining eco-columns, using three one-liter soda bottles to hold a terrarium on top and an aquarium below. This ecosystem becomes a model of our local forest (and pond) biome and is complete with elodea, duckweed, algae, mosquito fish, snails, mustard plants, crickets, and a few other plants. We use this eco-column to study life cycles: how the 'pond' and 'forest' are interdependent, the oxygen/nitrogen and water cycles, and the impact of how one missing specimen affects the entire ecosystem.*

*The students love this unit. They are eager to assemble it and then study the changes over a 10-week period. When the unit is finished, they get to take it home.*

*Each May, we visit The Iroquois National Refuge in Alabama, NY, to learn about the wetlands. Our 5th graders not only pay attention, they also attend having a solid background. Each year, we also receive the compliment of being the best-behaved and most learned group to attend.*

*I deeply appreciate your commitment to students gaining a heightened awareness and appreciation for the earth.*

*Sincerely,  
Joanne Tronolone*



# We Are Excited About Curriculum Development!



Family gathering in Los Cimientos, Guatemala

Now in its 15th year, the competition for our curriculum grants gets harder and harder. This reflects our growing reputation as an innovative provider of funds for hands-on environmental education, as well as growing public awareness of the need for increasing science literacy in schools. As the world struggles with complex global problems such as biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, and global climate change, our ability to understand, evaluate, process, and act upon scientific information becomes more critical.

We strive in allocating our funds to expose children to scientific inquiry and critical thinking in the specific context of environmental issues. Over the last five years, we have supported projects that have given children exposure to melting tundras in Alaska, turtles in local ponds in New Hampshire, forests and monkeys in Kenya, urban trees in North Carolina, and oyster growth in Virginia, just to name a few.

In 2011 we struggled to decide among 121 pre-proposals and 23 full proposals. After a spirited discussion, we chose three winners and we are excited to tell you about them.

## Iguanas And Students From Minnesota And Costa Rica Benefit

Innovative dedicated teachers do more than just teach in the classroom. Melinda's commitment to field study and service exemplified this ethic. We are proud to support the efforts of a similar teacher, Julie Quinn Kiernan of Minnesota. We awarded her school a grant that supports a service trip to Costa Rica to work with the Bri-Bri,

an indigenous group in the mountains of Costa Rica.

The Bri-Bri are working to conserve threatened green iguanas, which are poached for their eggs. Our funds will be used to build enclosures to protect their iguana hatchery, and will be built with the aid of the students from Minnesota. Our funds will also be used to tag the iguanas allowing for a scientific assessment of population size and survival. This integration of service to the broader community, work in develop-

ing nations, environmental conservation, and scientific inquiry brings together Melinda's ideals in a wonderful way.

## Ancestral Values Provide Guidance During A Troubled Time

In a rush to modernize, traditional perspectives are often lost. That is true in every country including our own. It is particularly acute in places that are modernizing quickly. Thankfully, community organizations have mobilized to document and share varying perspectives on resource management.

A very effective way to mix ideas across generations is to empower school students to interview and catalog oral histories through interviews with elders.

Our funds will directly support such a project in Guatemala, in collaboration with the Los Cimientos Alliance.

Their project will train youth environmental ambassadors who will:

- develop environmentally-based programs from oral histories and ancestral values, then
- travel across the regions working with peers in local schools.

We hope that this innovative project will take off across the region and we are proud to be able to assist.

## MGAEF Provides Prize For Environmental Innovation

In a first, we provided the financial prize to a project of the Toledo Institute of Development and Environment (TIDE), located in the Toledo district in southern Belize, Central America ([www.tidebelize.org](http://www.tidebelize.org)). TIDE has awarded a scholarship prize each year through the Youth Conservation Competition, which integrates performance, creativity, environmental education, and young role models to present information to the community on key environmental issues.

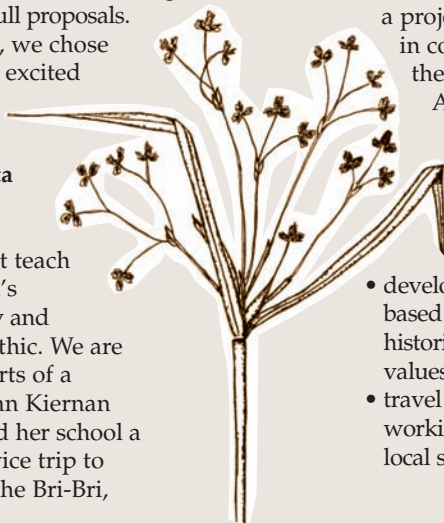


Belizeans in the Toledo district celebrating Independence Day and Belize's environmental heritage

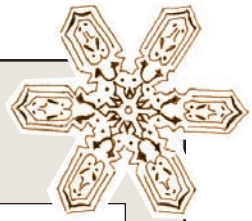
This year's theme is The Value of Forests. The competition is an innovative educational tool that fosters

- community involvement,
- empowerment of youth,
- appreciation of natural systems,
- environmental awareness, and
- the importance of local participation in conservation efforts.

TIDE seeks to create positive examples of young people within the community, while creating actual opportunities for aspiring students to achieve their educational goals that would be otherwise financially unachievable. The Youth Conservation Competition also promotes environmental action and awareness within the community, and engages all ages in the pursuit of a more environmentally conscious Punta Gorda.







## Our Favorite Mail to Read – Stories from Camp

Each year we are honored to send several students at the middle school and high school levels to environmental camps for a week of down-and-dirty science exploration. Students who attended camp in 2011 and 2012 are listed in the table on the right.

We would like to share with you excerpts from letters we received from three students, to give you a flavor of their unique experiences.



### Clare Mahoney, Buffalo Public School 81

Today I'm here to tell about my amazing camp experience and how on the last day it was almost heartbreaking to leave.

Not only was the staff amazing, the camp's natural beauty was breathtaking. On our day trip (so fun) I chose canoeing on the Genesee River and the sun glistened

on the water until it shone like gold. Towards the bank, the water lapped softly against glistening rocks, eventually giving way to tall reeds. It was a scene you just can't get in the city.

In conclusion, my experience at Camp Rushford was the highlight of my summer, and a fun experience I'll remember the rest of my life. If given the chance I'd definitely return again and again! I encourage all of you to do the same if you like nature, new friends and fun!

### Zachary Corey, Clarence High School

I would like to thank everyone that made my trip to attend the Adirondack Field Studies Program a possible one.

Being out there, taking actual plot data and studying in the wilderness has not only helped prepare me to attend SUNY-ESF next year, but has made me more interested in learning about the environment.

Thanks again to the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation Board for accepting me and I advise to keep this program going; I have gotten so much out of it.

### Adirondack Field Studies Program (high school level)

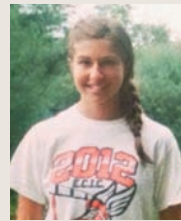
2012:	Zachary Corey	Clarence
	Jena Taylor	Newark
	Paige Bloomer	Newark

2011:	Tyler Skowronski	Clarence
	Courtney Elston	Clarence
	Ashley Trumble	Newark

### DEC Camp Rushford (middle school level)

2012:	Anna Meichenbaum	Clarence
	Alaina Wojciechowski	Clarence
	Emma Semmler	Newark
	Audrey Smith	Newark

2011:	Sarinah Hernandez	Newark
	Ekaterina Barrett	Newark
	Thomas Woodward	Clarence
	Matthew Spoth	Clarence
	Clare Mahoney	Buffalo



### Anna Meichenbaum, Clarence Middle School

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to go to Camp Rushford! I had an awesome time and learned a lot about the conservation of nature. This was such a great experience and I could not be more thankful for your generosity.



## A Look at Board Member Suzanne Gray Murphy



This year our featured board member is Suzanne Gray Murphy, Melinda's sister, who has served on the board since its inception in 1996. A Clarence native, Suzanne received a BS in Engineering from Cornell University and an MBA from the Simon School. Suzanne then managed product development and marketing for Xerox Corporation, Yeaple Corporation, and Tyco International Medical Products for 15 years. Since her children

arrived, she has done independent marketing consulting and medical office management.

Suzanne married Joseph Murphy in 1997 and lived in St. Louis, MO and New York, NY. They moved back to the Buffalo area in 2002 and now live in Clarence with their five children: Isabel Melinda, Michael, Jack, Abigail and Grace. They enjoy skiing, music, soccer, hiking, swimming and tennis.

Suzanne is Treasurer of the MGAEF Board, and has also volunteered with other organizations: the board of The Battered Women's Shelter in St. Louis, leadership in Landmark Education, coaching with Clarence Soccer Club, teaching with Junior Achievement, and other community involvement.

Suzanne continues to be inspired by memories of Melinda. Melinda's love for family, friends, nature, music, teaching, and children were extraordinary – and these passions have made a lasting impression on Suzanne's life and daily decisions. One of her fondest memories is visiting Melinda's earth science classroom in Newark, where Melinda shared an energetic and contagious love for science and the environment with her students. Also, Suzanne treasures the time they spent together in the Adirondacks, learning about plants from Melinda while hiking, and laughing together at campfires. She feels truly blessed to have had the gift of Melinda as her sister for 29 years.

# The Clarence Nature Center

*What is happening at the Clarence Nature Center?*

A portion of the former Thompson Road Trail was renamed to honor the memory of Melinda Gray-Ardia and in recognition of the important role the MGAEF has played in the development of the Clarence Nature Center.

These are some of the other changes that have taken place:

- Since 2010 the Clarence Nature Center has hosted 1818 K-12 students; 12 organizations with a total of 397+ members; 331 teachers, teacher aides, and parent assistants; and 5 Eagle Scout projects (125 scouts and parents).
- New Trail signs were purchased and mounted by the Clarence Parks Department to identify the 5 most frequently used trails.
- Aluminum plaques have been mounted on large rocks to indicate points of interest corresponding to the trail guides.
- A new trail was created from a trail that was originally created by deer traffic and was appropriately named The Deer Trail.



New trail sign invites you to hike the trail honoring Melinda

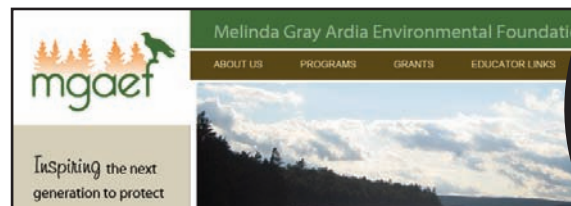
- Work was also done on the Thompson Road Trail to clear fallen branches, and moving logs into place to outline the trail.
- Four new table/bench combinations were purchased for the Nature Center with the help of the Contemporary Club of Clarence and the Friends of Clarence Garden Club.
- Additional new resource materials were purchased for use with teachers and school groups planning to use using the facility.
- The Clarence School System purchased a WiFi hotspot so that school groups making use of the facility would access to the Internet for researching information.
- A tool storage shed was designed and built by students and teachers from the Technology Department at Clarence High School.
- A new sign for the Clarence Nature Center will be erected near the entrance road to the Nature Center on Sheridan Drive.
- We now have a document camera that can be used inside the Nature Center building, to display documents or specimens for students.



## Send a Meaningful Gift This Season

**MGAEF Wildlife Notecards** – A perfect holiday gift, each 12 notecard set features 6 different color photos of African animals taken by Melinda while in Kenya with the Peace Corps. These beautiful cards can be used for any occasion. Cost is \$10.00 per set, plus \$1.00 shipping. Please order using enclosed order form, or online at [www.mgaef.org](http://www.mgaef.org).

**Gift "In Honor or Memory Of"** – A meaningful way to honor or remember a special person! Make a contribution in their name to MGAEF, where your gift will advance environmental education, and we will send an acknowledgment letter to the honoree or family. Perfect for holidays, birthdays, and remembrance. Please indicate honoree or family name and address so we can send them an acknowledgment letter.



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