



Fiddleheads and Feathers



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

Fall 2024

From the President

Greetings! It has been a long time since we have shared a newsletter. During that time, the MGAEF has stayed active continuing our programs to support environmental education both locally and internationally. We remain committed to supporting students from Clarence, Lancaster and Newark, NY to attend summer experiential environmental camps.

These in-the-woods opportunities are transformative for kids, allowing them to build confidence, develop friendships, and expand their connection with nature. Testimonials from students over the years reveal

meaningful experiences that have long-lasting effects on the personal and professional trajectories of participants. Our environmental grant program remains active. In this newsletter, you'll read more about the continued activity and impact of our programs.

We are so honored to welcome 2 new board members-- Don Gray and Izzy Melinda Murphy. Don is Melinda's father, and Izzy is the child of Suzanne Gray Murphy and grandchild of Don and Alice Gray. Izzy shares many interests and traits with their Aunt Melinda. Izzy brings disciplinary insights from undergraduate studies in environmental sciences, as well a strong

personal connection to the Foundation.

It was also a grief-filled time for those of us associated with the MGAEF. Alice Gray passed away in May 2023. In celebrating Alice's life, we were all reminded of the formative role her love of nature and the outdoors played in sculpting Melinda's own passion for the environment. We founded this organization to support multi-generational impacts that outlast us all. It was powerful to be reminded that Alice's love of nature continues on in the MGAEF.

New Board Members: Don Gray and Izzy Melinda Murphy



Don Gray has been active with MGAEF since it was founded in 1996. He opted not to be on the Board of Directors at that time because he was working in China, and did not believe that he could then properly serve the Board as an active member. Rather, he supported his wife Alice as an active Board member of

MGAEF.

Don took on the role of coordinating the MGAEF-sponsored Student Summer Camp Program. Working with the Newark, Clarence and Lancaster Schools, this Program has sponsored over (100) students to the DEC Conservation Camp Rushford (7th Grade students), and to the Syracuse University ESF / BOCES Environmental Camp at Cranberry Lake in the Adirondacks (11th Grade students).

Don returned from China and retired from General Motors in 1998, and has been actively supporting MGAEF since repatriating. Don and Alice bought a summer home on Chautauqua Lake in New York, and enjoyed many seasons on the lake and at the Chautauqua Institution with their children and grandchildren. Don and Alice were also avid travelers, visiting Melinda in her Peace Corps assignment in both Kenya and in Fiji, as well as visiting many other countries in both Europe and Asia.



Izzy Murphy is thrilled to join the board of MGAEF. After graduating from the University of Rochester with bachelors degrees in Environmental Science and Political Science, Izzy began working with a team at the NYS OAG's Environmental Protection

Bureau that holds landlords accountable for the neglect of their aging properties that causes low-income tenants and their families to suffer. They are particularly passionate about environmental justice and striving for equitable housing for all.

Izzy feels extremely connected to their Aunt Melinda through their shared passion for the environment and for the many living creatures we share the planet with. Melinda's fun-loving, empathetic, and strong-willed spirit has inspired Izzy to live their life authentically.

In their free time, Izzy enjoys rock climbing, crocheting, reading, creating art, and spending time with friends. One fun fact about Izzy is that they recently moved to Brooklyn and have around 60 houseplants in their apartment!



Environmental Curriculum Grant Update

The MGAEF has a long-standing environmental curriculum grant program that impacts students locally and globally. We have awarded multiple grants every year since the formation of the foundation. The reach and visibility of our work has grown and we regularly receive proposals from every continent on the globe (except Antarctica!).

We balance our awards to be sure we support proposals in US schools and internationally. We feel this best fits Melinda's own commitment to education right here at home, as well as across the globe. Our supported projects bring to life environmental education in various impactful ways, including field trips, research programs, experiential learning, hands-on activities, and case studies to bring home the content students need to learn and master.

Since we've last sent a newsletter, we have awarded a range of grants. We'd like to provide an overview of some highlights.

Cultivating Bird Conservation in Kenya

To honor Melinda's Peace Corps service in Kenya, we've prioritized projects in Kenya. Funds were provided to a non-profit in Nakuru to build primary school students' awareness of endangered birds. Students combined field projects with in class lessons, as well as community engagement.

Marine Science Experiences in Florida

We provided support to the Angari Foundation to directly support at-sea learning for students to board their research vessel. There is simply no replacement for ocean time to learn about the marine environment. Our funds allowed an additional school to benefit from this impactful experience.

Medicinal Schoolyard Forest in Bangladesh

Working with a local school, the MGAEF provided funds to develop a small scale native plant medicinal forest adjacent to the school building. This project allowed students to understand and value local biodiversity, as well as expand their cultural knowledge.

Our Favorite Mail to Read – Stories from Camp

Alex Majewski, Clarence High School

My name is Alexis Majewski and I am one of the two students you sponsored at the Cranberry Lake research program this past summer. I



Alex Majewski with friends at the Cranberry Lake Camp

wanted to thank you for the incredible experience you made possible for me. I didn't know what to expect going into the program and am truly happy to say that my time spent at Cranberry Lake far exceeded my expectations in terms of the quality of education provided, the welcoming community at the base, and the amazing people I was able to meet. I gained an immense amount of knowledge on topics I didn't even know existed before and developed a greater appreciation for the natural world and its truly complex beauty. Each day of the program challenged me academically and drove me to work hard; pushing me to dig deeper than surface level. I was able to learn about many areas of study that would never be covered in a regular science class at Clarence High School, including ornithology, entomology, and botany. My project group chose to focus on moss and its water retention capabilities, which is a topic that we never would have considered before our week at camp. It was amazing to be in an environment with peers who were just as passionate about science as myself, and I'm incredibly grateful for the friendships I was able to create just in the short week I was at the base. Throughout the week, we went on many hikes and boat rides, completed fieldwork, and studied organisms under microscopes. We also got to do lots of kayaking. My cabinmates and I became extremely close during the program, and

even though we live hours apart from each other, I am happy to say we are still in contact to this day.

I hope Cranberry Lake continues to host this incredible program because it changed my life and can impact kids for years to come.



October 12, 2022

I am writing to thank you for your amazing, gracious sponsor for the ADK Field Course Program. I was astounded and overwhelmed with excitement to have learned that I would be the recipient of your scholarship.

I am currently a Junior and plan to attend college at either the University of Buffalo, or ESF. I absolutely love biology and see myself majoring in the field. The opportunity to have worked with some of the professors and work hands-on with experiments, provided me with not only increasing interest but also understanding in what areas I may want to pursue within the various fields of biology. While I was in the program, I completed a project on Ghost Pipe. It is a non photosynthetic plant that feeds off of the nutrients in the roots of trees. The flowers of the plant only sprout above the ground one week of the year. My group and I were lucky enough to be able to study the Ghost Pipe during that one week. Thanks to your sponsorship and support, I was able to study it and learn more about the interesting components of the ghost pipe.

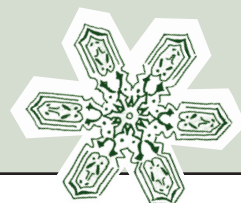
I cannot thank you enough. Your generosity and support means so much to me. I will take all that I've learned from this trip with me to college and use it to help guide me in my future career decisions.

Sincerely,
Madelyn Stashak

Madelyn Stashak, Clarence High School

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Hannah Dunn

My name is Hannah Dunn and I was one of the students that were lucky enough to be a part of the Adirondack Field Studies because of your grant. I am so thankful for you and have learned so much about myself and science through the Adirondack experience. I met so many amazing people that I will never forget and got to learn about the ecology of the Adirondacks. My days were filled with laughter and learning. Being able to learn in the environment hands-on was one of the best learning experiences I have ever had. For my field study, my group and I studied if the DBH (diameter at breast height) of trees found closest to Ghost Pipe had any effect on Ghost Pipe abundance and average height. Ghost Pipe is a

nonphotosynthetic plant that I have only seen in the Adirondacks. It looks so cool and there is not much research done on it so we were able to study a lot about this plant. I wish everyone got the chance to go through this experience because it is something I will always remember. I cannot thank you enough!

Kyleigh Avedisian, Newark Central School

I wanted to take the time to thank you for awarding me the scholarship from your foundation. It was very nice to have the opportunity to attend Camp Rushford. I had so much fun at camp! I made new friends, learned about nature, and my favorite part was the overnight camping trip. I will always remember my time there. I was even asked to return next year as a volunteer! Thank you once again for giving me this opportunity.

To whom it may concern,
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Kyleigh Avedisian
Newark Central School student

In Loving Memory of Alice Gray

Alice Gray, Melinda's mother and MGAEF board member for 27 years, passed away peacefully on May 22, 2023. Alice loved nature, children and animals, and was certainly very influential in developing and nurturing Melinda's passion for the environment and all living things.

Alice was a registered nurse, a speech pathologist, and a leader in many community groups including President of the Breast Cancer Network of WNY and Director of their Education Day.

After losing Melinda in a tragic car accident on January 19, 1996, Alice bravely reached out to other parents who had lost children, to offer encouragement, support, and hope for healing.

Alice contributed to the MGAEF in countless ways, including her commitment to the development of the Clarence Nature Center, and her work on the summer camp and the educational grant committees.

Despite our sadness, we are grateful for Alice's zest for life, love for friends and family, and for sharing the gift of Melinda with the world. We rest in peace believing that Alice and Melinda are reunited together again, surrounded by wildflowers, ferns and dragonflies.

Many thanks Alice, for your generosity and courage, and for all you have contributed to many communities including the MGAEF.



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