

BRUSHWOOD



Community Strong



BRUSHWOOD CENTER ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Students explore nature in Bowen Park,
Waukegan, IL during a partner program with
Cool Learning Experience | October 2023

“Brushwood is
a sanctuary.”

Angela Walker

US Navy Veteran | Vocalist | At Ease Advisor

Dear Friends,

Thanks to the passion and dedication of our volunteers, artists, and donors, 2023 was a record-breaking year of impact for Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods. **Brushwood Center’s initiatives connected more than 10,000 people to art and nature in Lake County and across the Chicago region.**

This year, Brushwood Center released our new report, *Health, Equity, and Nature: A Changing Climate in Lake County, Illinois*. We shared the report’s findings and recommendations with more than 3,000 civic leaders and community members to date, sparking change in sectors across our community from city governments to small businesses.

Through our *It’s A W.I.N. (Art and Wellness in Nature)* initiative, students and families engaged in field trips, art classes, concerts, and education programs across Lake County. *Nature Explorer Backpacks / Mochilas de Explorador* had an unparalleled year, providing backpacks with art and educational resources to more than 1,200 youth.

Our *At Ease* initiative served more than 600 Veterans this year. Utilizing the healing power of arts and nature, this program is improving the health, wellbeing, and quality of life for military and Veteran populations, as well as their families and caregivers.

Brushwood Center collaborated with more than 90 partners and 300 artists to improve health, equity, and access to nature, all while centering community voices and strengths. Our year culminated with Baratunde Thurston, Distinguished Environmental Leadership Awardee, gracing the stage at the 40th Annual Smith Nature Symposium, and celebrating Brushwood’s *Connecting to Our Common Ground* exhibition in partnership with Hyde Park Art Center and Patric McCoy.

Thank you for sharing your commitment with us, for believing in Brushwood Center’s vision, and ensuring a year of impact in 2023!



Catherine Game
Executive Director



A. Gail Sturm
Chair, Board of Directors

P.S. Dive deeper into Brushwood’s 2023 on the back page of this report.

Our Vision

We work toward a future of resilient and connected communities, both human and ecological, where all lead healthy and thriving lives.

Our Mission

Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods works collaboratively with community partners, artists, health care providers, and scientists to improve health equity and access to nature in Lake County, Illinois, and the Chicago region. We engage people with the outdoors through the arts, environmental education, and community action. Brushwood Center's programs focus on youth, families, Military Veterans, and those facing racial and economic injustices.



Student holding an oak leaf during a partner program with Cool Learning Experience | October 2023



Health, Equity, and Nature Accelerator

In 2023, Brushwood Center released our new report, *Health, Equity, and Nature: A Changing Climate in Lake County, Illinois*. The report was distributed through community partnerships and outreach, including a presentation at the National Land Trust Alliance's Rally for Land conference as well as Brushwood Center's *Third Annual Community Leadership Roundtable*. Brushwood also co-hosted the *On the Grounds* program series with Drip & Culture, a community-focused coffee shop in Waukegan. This series combined nature walks, coffee demonstrations, and discussions on health equity with community members.

Cellular Healing Forest Blanket

Kendra Kett

Visible Exhibition | June 2023



2,000+

Health, Equity, and Nature Reports distributed locally and regionally.

3,000+

Civic leaders, community organizations, advocacy groups, community members, and funders engaged with the report findings through presentations, partnerships, and outreach.

100+

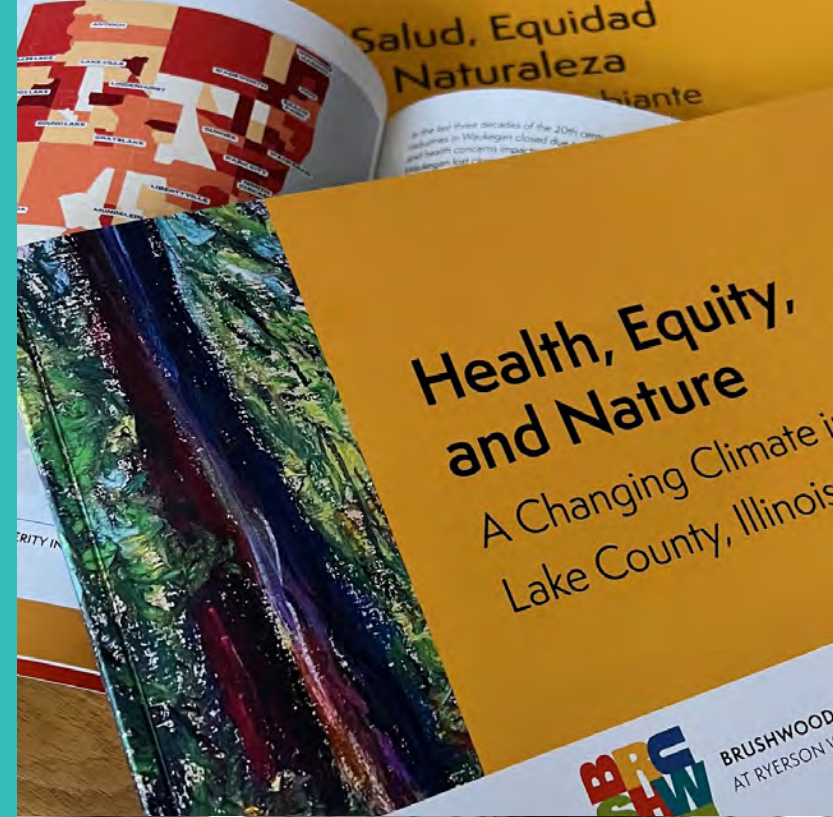
Community leaders, and elected officials attended the *Third Annual Community Leadership Roundtable* to pledge their joint commitment to improve the environment, health, and wellbeing of our communities.

The Health, Equity, and Nature Report published in English and Spanish

Dani Abboud (Senior Program Director), presents at 2023 Roundtable

Asset mapping exercise with participants

From left: Dr. Héctor Rasgado-Flores (Brushwood Board Member), Adam Carson (Owner of *Drip & Culture*), and Catherine Game (Executive Director) share the findings of the Report with community members during *On the Grounds*.



Visible

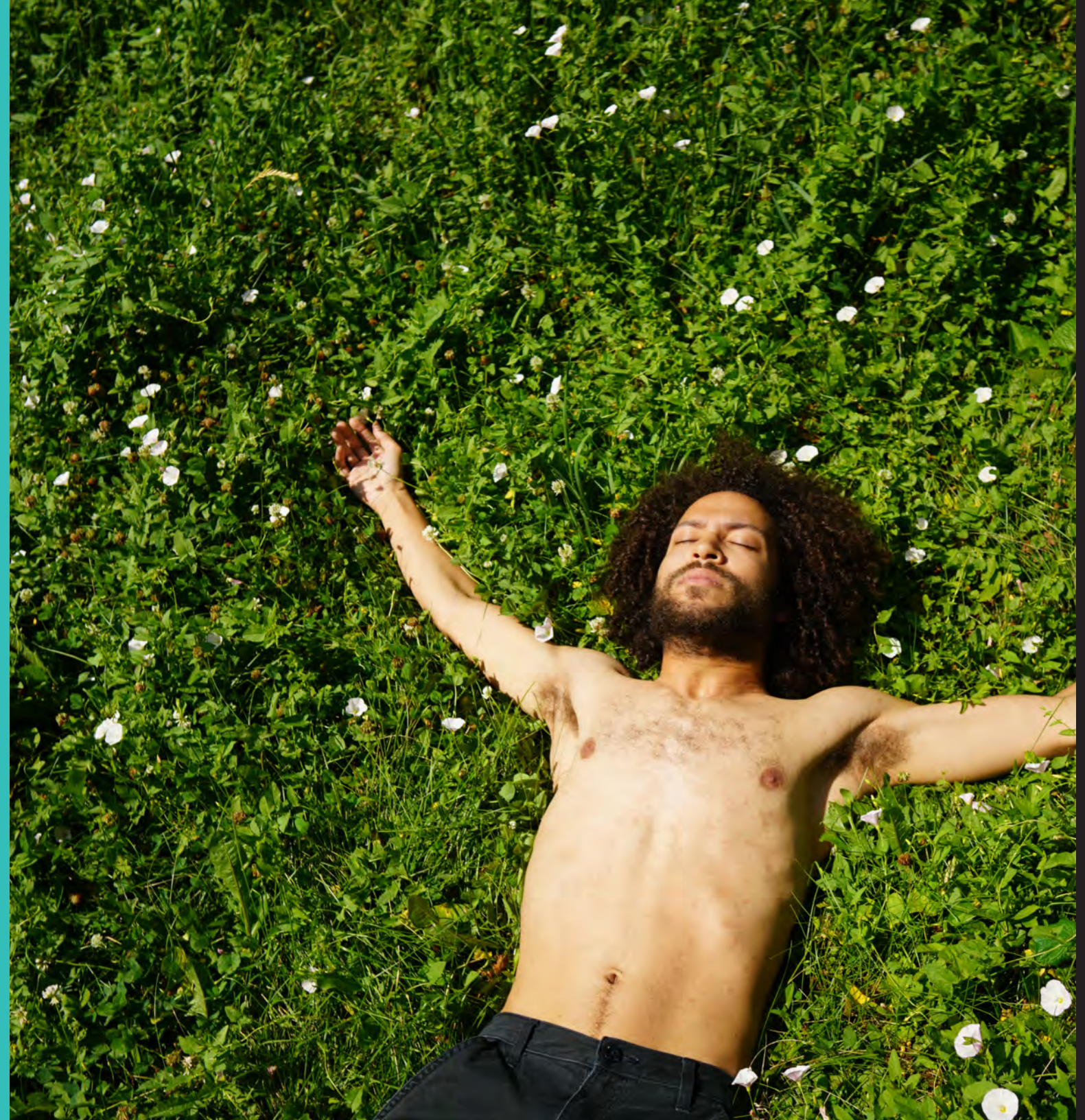
Companion Art Exhibition to The Health, Equity, and Nature Report

Visible presented pieces from twenty-six artists from Lake County, Chicago, and beyond. The exhibition consisted of interviews, maps, and artworks highlighting how systemic inequities impact our communities' access to a healthy environment. Inspired by our *Health, Equity, and Nature Report*, this exhibition was a powerful example of art as a tool for systemic change.

Liberation, 2020

Dawaune Lamont Hayes

Visible Exhibition | June 2023



“The process was really just about being candid, exploring our wilderness, our urban meadow if you will. The site [of *Liberation 2020*, previous page] is actually a block away from the highway.....but in those picture(s) it is like you’re in an oasis, because you are.”

Dawaune Lamont Hayes

Artist | *Visible* Exhibition





At Ease

Art and Nature for Veterans and the Military Community

More than doubling our impact over the last two years, the full force of *At Ease* was expanded through new community engagement tools. *At Ease* blossomed this year with weekly art programming and nature walks for Veterans and the Military Community, a new six-week musical composition residency, a Women Veterans retreat, and more. *At Ease* mentored five Skillbridge interns in 2023 through a partnership with the United States Department of Defense.

Family attends the annual *At Ease*
Exhibition Opening Reception.
Soundscapes | November 2023



900+

Veterans and Military Community members served through arts and nature programming.

50+

Workshops, classes, programs, and events centered healing and wellness for Veterans.

90%

Of *At Ease* participants report an improved sense of wellbeing.

At Ease participant paints mural at
Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center

Final day of the *Water(color) for the Soul*
composition residency with Veterans

Wednesday Walker Partner Program with
Lake Forest Open Lands

Lawrence Piemontese (US Air Force) and wife
Claudia at *Soundscapes* Opening Reception



“I have always wanted to exhibit my work, and never got the chance. I want to thank Brushwood Center for displaying my work. As a Veteran I very much appreciate it. I will never forget this, that you gave me the opportunity to show my art.”

Dante Plata

US Army Veteran | *Soundscapes* Exhibition Artist



It's A W.I.N.

Art and Wellness in Nature

It's A W.I.N. co-created culturally sensitive programs, classes, field trips, and nature outings for more than 2,000 youth and families. This included publishing “*Find Yourself Outside*,” a kid-friendly interpretation of the *Health, Equity, and Nature Report*. We distributed this activity book at Brushwood events and through community partners. The activity book was also included as part of our *Nature Explorer Backpacks / Mochilas de Explorador*. This was the largest year of impact yet for the *Nature Explorer Backpacks*. Thanks to unprecedented donations, Brushwood Center reached more families than ever before. 77% of surveyed families felt more confident exploring the outdoors as a result of the *Nature Explorer Backpacks*.

Students explore nature at Brushwood Center during a community partner field trip with Nuestro Center | July 2023



1,700+

Youth and families connected to art and nature through direct programs.

1,200

Nature Explorer Backpacks / Mochilas de Explorador distributed throughout Lake County, IL.

2,000

Students received *Find Yourself Outside* nature activity books.

Student stands proudly with a *Nature Explorer Backpack*
at a partner event with Highwood Library | June 2023



“Being a homeschool family, we’ve enjoyed numerous moments exploring Ryerson Woods and engaging in Cool Learning Experience. We attended the Indigenous Peoples’ Day Program at Bowen Park and were captivated by rich history, drum sessions, and sense of familial connection. The event catered to all of our children, ages 2 to 12, creating a lasting memory rooted in wellness.”

Ashley Cullen-Williams

Community Partner | Lake County, IL Parent

Ashley pictured third from right at *It's A W.I.N.* program with community partner, Cool Learning Experience, honoring Indigenous Peoples’ Day | October 2023





Public Programs

Music and The Arts

Brushwood's public art programs, classes, concerts, markets, and exhibitions reflected diverse voices exploring themes on equity, justice, and the impact of nature on wellbeing. This was also a year of cross-pollination with our *At Ease* and *It's A W.I.N.* initiatives resulting in innovative residencies, exhibitions, and events.

Brushwood Center celebrated 40 years of The Smith Nature Symposium, honoring the memory of Hermon Dunlap and Ellen Thorne Smith. The Distinguished Environmental Leadership Award recognized the commitment and leadership of Baratunde Thurston, writer, TV host, and speaker.

Angela Walker (US Navy Veteran)
performs at annual *At Ease* Exhibition
Opening Reception.
Soundscapes | November 2023



4,500

Participants were connected to nature and wellbeing through the arts.

300+

Artists and musicians engaged throughout the year.

40

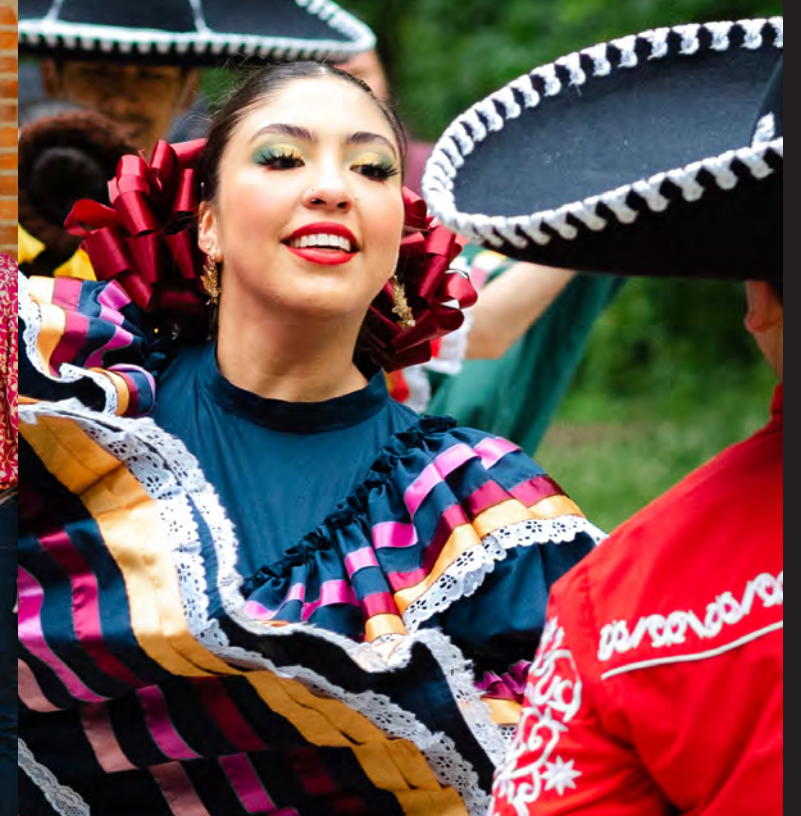
Years celebrating The Smith Nature Symposium.

Michael Pamoncutt from *Seven Spring All Nation Drum*, at the Smith Nature Symposium

Emcees Bill Kurtis and Donna LaPietra at the 40th Annual Smith Nature Symposium

From left: Renee Robbins (Artist), Preston Thomas (Artist), Julia Kemerer (Director of Arts and Administration), Sheri Rush (Artist), and Patric McCoy (Juror) | *Connecting to Our Common Ground* Exhibition

Grupo Folklorico México En La Piel perform at *Visible* Exhibition Opening



Smith Nature Symposium

40th Anniversary Celebration

The 40th Annual Smith Nature Symposium, *Celebrate! Connecting to Our Common Ground*, was a dynamic series of events, exhibitions, and panels culminating in a sold out Smith Awards Dinner and raising \$185,000 to support Brushwood Center's programs. Emceed by Bill Kurtis and Donna La Pietra, The Smith Awards Dinner took place at the beautiful Greenbelt Cultural Center in North Chicago. Baratunde Thurston, host of PBS' *America Outdoors*, received the Environmental Leadership Award for his work as a storyteller and activist. Thank you to our Smith Symposium 40th Anniversary Honorary Co-Chairs, Adele Simmons and Barbara C. Donnelley, as well as our Event Co-Chairs, Rob Heinrich and Jacalyn Ramdin-Johnson.

From left: Celeste Flores (Board Member), Jacalyn Ramdin-Johnson (Event Co-Chair), Baratunde Thurston (Awardee), Mirja Spooner Haffner (Director of Development), and Adam Carson (*Drip and Culture*)

Catherine Game (Executive Director) on right with Youth Environmental Leadership Awardees Tyler Bolden and Eliana Bernat

Rob Heinrich (Event Co-Chair), with North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham

Baratunde Thurston with Adele Simmons and Barbara C. Donnelley (Honorary Co-Chairs)



“What I discovered on my visit made me feel truly honored in the sense of humility and appreciation for Brushwood’s mission. I was inspired by young scholars, moved by the comprehensive nature of the mission, and challenged and educated by the people in attendance. I’m so, so excited I got to share some time and space with Brushwood. I’m sure it won’t be the last.

Keep up the amazing work!”

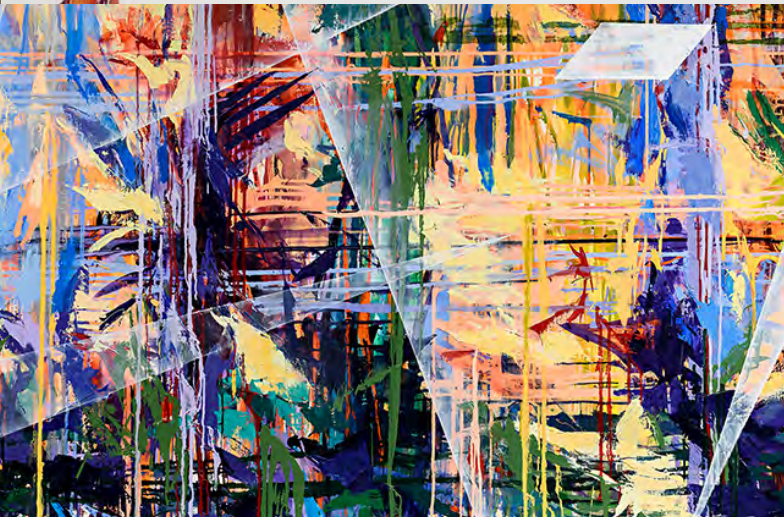
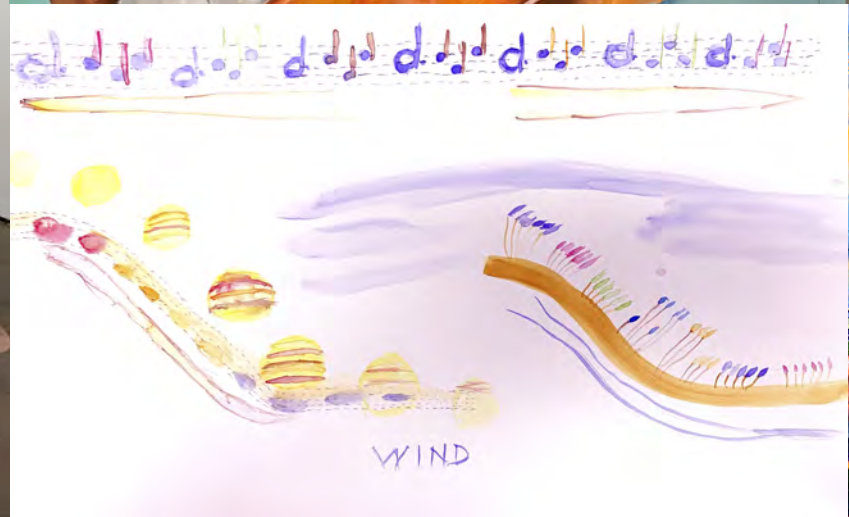
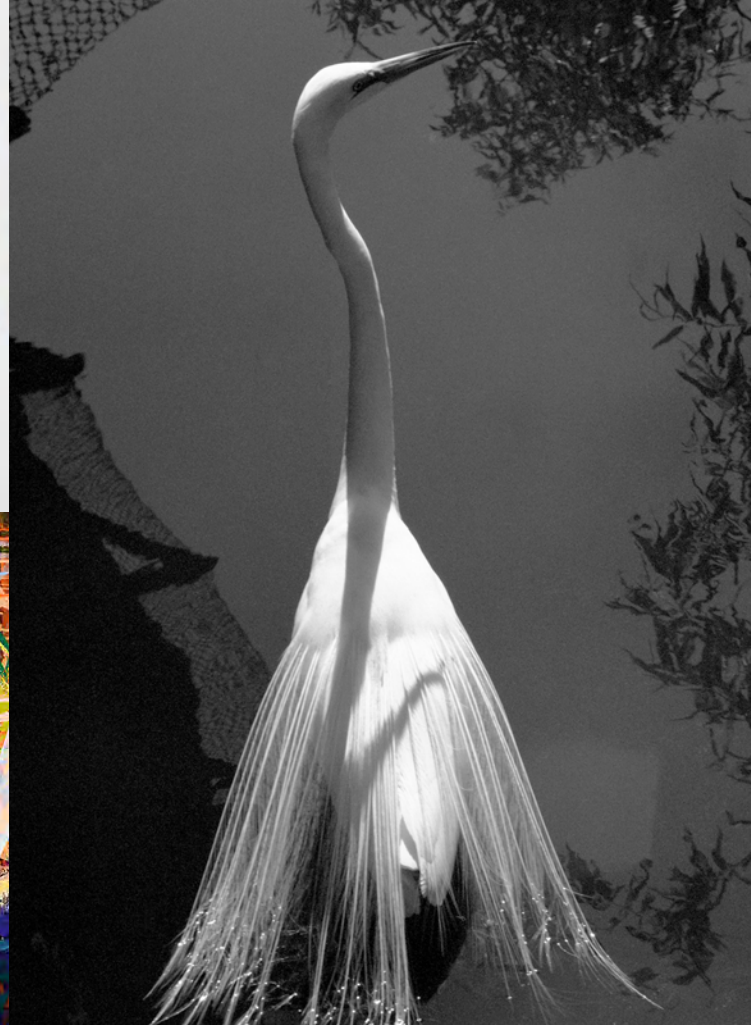
Baratunde Thurston

Distinguished Environmental Leadership Awardee

40th Smith Nature Symposium

Baratunde Thurston at Brushwood Center
at Ryerson Woods | October 2023





In The Gallery

Enriching Life | 8th Annual Botanical Art Exhibition | January 2023

Where are the Birds? Retracing Audubon | Krista Elrick Exhibition | March 2023

Visible | Companion Exhibition to the Health, Equity, and Nature Report | June 2023

Water(color) for the Soul | Graphic Composition Residency for Veterans | June 2023

Connecting to Our Common Ground | 40th Smith Symposium Exhibition with Hyde Park Art Center | September 2023

Soundscapes: Visualizing the Healing Sounds of Nature | Annual At Ease Art Exhibition | November 2023

Clockwise from left:

Lithostatic 1 | Farah Salem | *Connecting to our Common Ground* | September 2023

Public Safety | Matthew Cooper | *Health, Equity, and Nature Report* | June 2023

#84 American Elm Leaf, Ulmus americana | Ramiro Prudencio | *Enriching Life* | January 2023

A snowy egret (Egretta thula) at a theme park near the St. John's River in Florida, 2011 | Krista Elrick |

Where are the Birds? Retracing Audubon | March 2023

Elusive Clarity | Sheri Rush | *Connecting to Our Common Ground* | September 2023

Sunset | Janet Billings | *Water(color) for the Soul* | June 2023



BASE

Brushwood Art Supply Exchange

BASE (Brushwood Art Supply Exchange) is our pay-what-you-can creative reuse center where unwanted art and craft supplies find new life and avoid landfills. *BASE* provides opportunities for up-cycled creativity through monthly community classes. In 2023, *BASE* hosted *Make With Me* classes where families and kids joined in the fun of sustainable crafting. All items in *BASE* are free to educators and Brushwood Center community partners.

Create and Sip Decoupage Class
January 2023

Make with Me Class for families
throughout the year

Create and Sip Wreath Making Class
November 2023

Create and Sip Mosaics Class
September 2023

Financials

REVENUE

Individuals	\$214,623
Foundations	\$289,408
Corporations	\$35,795
Government	\$122,050
Organizations	\$3,385
Program Revenue	\$85,916
In Kind	\$43,979
Other Income	\$3,995
Net Assets Released from Restriction	\$514,709
Total Revenues	\$1,313,860

EXPENSES

Program Services	\$1,123,310
Management & General	\$76,624
Fundraising	\$102,637
Total Expenses	\$1,302,571

Net Assets without Donor Restrictions	\$768,053
Net Assets with Donor Restrictions	\$1,549,847

Increase in Net Assets	\$208,253
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Total Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$2,109,647
Total Net Assets at End of Year	\$2,317,900

Des Plaines River Trail

Elizabeth Wilson

Visible Exhibition | June 2023

Leadership

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Our Partners

- Alloy Horn Quartet
- Art Impact Project
- Arts Alliance Illinois
- Black Moon Trio
- Cancer Wellness Center
- Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center
- Chicago Botanic Garden
- Chicago Chamber Choir
- The Chicago High School for the Arts
- Chicago Wilderness Alliance
- Christ Episcopal Church
- Citizens for Conservation
- Clean Power Lake County
- Coalición Latinos Unidos de Lake County
- College of Lake County
- Cool Learning Experience
- Dandelion Gallery
- Deerfield, Bannockburn, Riverwoods Chamber of Commerce
- DePaul University
- Drip and Culture Co.
- Elawa Farm
- Environmental Education Association of Illinois
- Emily Oaks Nature Center
- Faith in Place
- Family Piano Co
- Fenix Family Health Center
- The Field Museum
- Fifth House Ensemble
- Forefront
- Forest Preserves of Cook County
- Garden Club of Lincolnshire
- GiveNKind
- Gratitude Generation
- Green Card Veterans
- Green Wedding Alliance
- Growing Healthy Veterans
- Healthcare Foundation of Northern Lake County
- Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies
- Heller Nature Center
- Highwood Library and Community Center
- Hilton Asmus Contemporary
- Honey B Wellz
- Hyde Park Art Center
- Illinois Beach State Park
- Illinois Environmental Council
- Indiana Dunes National Park
- Josselyn Center
- Kawai Pianos
- Kids Rank
- Kleisis Ensemble
- Lake County Audubon Society
- Lake County Community Foundation
- Lake County Forest Preserves
- Lake County Health Department
- Lake County Nature Network
- Lake County Veterans and Family Services
- LGBTQ+ Center Lake County
- Mano a Mano Family Resource Center
- Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
- The Mission Continues
- Mission Man Media
- Mundelein Park and Recreation District
- Nature Culture and Human Health
- North Chicago Public Library
- North Chicago Think Tank
- Northwestern University
- Old Town School of Folk Music
- One Earth Film Festival
- Park District of Highland Park
- Parliament Data
- Prairie Crossing Charter School
- Public Broadcasting Service
- Riverwoods Preservation Council
- Roberti Community House
- Rotary Club of North Chicago
- Round Lake Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee
- Round Lake Public Library
- Save the Monarchs
- SeaLegacy
- The Self Care Institute
- Seven Spring All Nation Drum
- Sierra Club's Woods and Wetlands Group
- Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County
- U.S. Forest Service International Programs
- Vernon Area Public Library
- Village of Riverwoods
- Visit Lake County
- Warren Newport Public Library
- Waukegan Park District
- Waukegan Public Library
- Wayfarer Theaters
- The Way of the Rain

Our Team

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Health, Equity, and Nature Accelerator Research Fellow
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Director of Arts and Administration
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- Parker Nelson
Director of Public Programs and Music
- Angela Ramirez
Administrative Coordinator
- Jess Rodriguez
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Jose Morales	Janelle Moravek	Robin Remer	Judy Woznyj
Bob Morgan	Bob Morgan	Jane and James Richards	Judith Yacker
Danielle Morrison	Danielle Morrison	Whitney Richardson	Hyewon Yoon
Lois Morrison and Justin Daab	Lois Morrison and Justin Daab	Eric Rinehart	Patti Youngberg
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For more information

on Brushwood Center and to support our mission, please contact:

Mirja Spooner Haffner

Director of Development

m Spoonerhaffner@brushwoodcenter.org

224.633.2424 ext. 6



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