









# **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**







# **MISSION**

### Everyone deserves access to high-quality public green space.

NYRP works collaboratively with residents in communities across the five boroughs to renovate gardens, restore parks, plant trees, promote urban agriculture, and build partnerships that transform the city's landscape. We value the unique experiences, knowledge, and resources that each community member brings to our work. We are committed to creating a greener, more resilient city for all.



New York Restoration Project Founder, Bette Midler.



# Leadership

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- \* Stepped down from Board October 2023
- \*\* Elected Co-Chair January 2024

### FROM OUR

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

New York Restoration Project's work is as vital as ever. As the city weathered the hottest summer on record this past year, NYRP's parks, gardens, and trees were essential defenses against all-too-common extreme heat, polluted air, and severe flooding.

We rose to the occasion thanks to our committed donors. Throughout many of the city's most vulnerable communities, NYRP planted and distributed 4,500 trees, built 17 new green spaces, and expanded our efforts to prevent the erosion of Manhattan's largest remaining wetland. We removed over 60,000 pounds of litter and enlisted approximately 2,000 volunteers to expand our citywide efforts. Even as the pandemic's grip on our daily lives has waned since 2020, demand for NYRP's services has continually grown.

This necessary work began as a privatepublic partnership almost 30 years ago when our founder, Bette Midler, started picking up

trash in parks. At its very best over time, our longstanding collaboration between the private and public sectors has empowered NYRP to transform acres of neglected parkland, preserve dozens of beloved community gardens, and plant over a million trees in the areas that need them most.

In recent months, however, we've realized NYRP's work must rely on philanthropy more than ever. The City of New York is facing a budget crisis and slashing all agency budgets. The Parks Department, a foundational partner of NYRP's work, will suffer from severely reduced funding and so will its green spaces. Further, while inflation and rising interest rates hurt us all, a reduction in public services hit many of the communities NYRP serves the hardest. Your donation to NYRP helps us to bridge the gap in New York's time of need.

Even as the cost of our work rises while public support dips, NYRP will not back down from our mission to ensure equal access to nature's unquestionable benefits for every New Yorker. We believe in the power of philanthropy to achieve this vision as much as we count on the City to help make its own land accessible and well-maintained for its residents. NYRP will continue our work on both fronts to maintain our work's critical private-public balance.

As ever, we are here to deepen our efforts with your continued donations. Access to nature is a fundamental human right and we know we will reach new milestones together this coming year. Thank you for making this work possible.

With gratitude,

Lvnn Bodnar Kellv **Executive Director** 



### FROM OUR **BOARD CO-CHAIRS**

At New York Restoration Project, we are dedicated to ensuring that all New Yorkers have equitable access to nature throughout the city. We are proud to say that, as of 2023, over 1.6 million people live within a 10-minute walk of an NYRP green space.

This past year we continued our work stewarding community parks and gardens throughout all five boroughs. Working in collaboration with local partners, NYRP turned underutilized outdoor spaces into productive new gardens in some of the city's least green and most underserved neighborhoods.

With the generous help of our partners and over 1,500 volunteers, this year we:

- Removed over **86,565 pounds of trash** from parks;
- Composted 110,940 pounds of organic materials:
- Distributed 10,500 plant starts and seedlings to gardeners;
- Worked with over **700 urban gardeners** in our community to cultivate 19,000 square feet of raised garden beds;
- · Planted and distributed over 4,500 trees, including hosting 20 free tree giveaway events;
- Hosted 165 workshops, skill shares, and technical consultations for almost 1,000 gardeners;
- Built 17 new green spaces at schools, community organizations, and public libraries;
- Welcomed over **1,500 volunteers** to plant trees and help maintain our parks and gardens;
- And hosted over 245 public programs and events for over 7,000 community members.

NYRP continues to advocate for and work with its stakeholders to enhance the budget of New York City's Parks Department. Everyone deserves a city that is clean, green, and resilient in the face of the climate crisis.

Thank you for championing our mission to ensure that all New Yorkers can access the critical benefits of green space. Your donations continue to make a difference every day, especially in the areas of our city that need it most.

With gratitude,

Darcy Stacom and Samuel M. Ashner

Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees



# Restoring PARKLAND

The NYC Parks Department budget has been less than 1% of the entire city budget since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. Even though the department is responsible for more than 14% of the city's total land area, severely inadequate operating funds have constricted their operations for decades.

While the fight for municipal park resources is ongoing, nonprofit groups like New York Restoration Project have forged public-private relationships for years to help bridge the resource gap. Thanks to our longstanding partnership with NYC Parks, we have initiated

In partnership with The American Chestnut Foundation and NYC Parks, NYRP operates the largest urban trial to restore the functionally extinct American chestnut to its native range. Since 2017, our American chestnut hybrids in Highbridge Park have shown robust growth in a highly disturbed urban environment, including bearing nuts for the first time last year-an encouraging indicator of the hybrid's development and resiliency.



and overseen the transformation of dozens of acres of parkland since our founder Bette Midler began picking up trash in Northern Manhattan in 1995.

Today in Washington Heights and Inwood, NYRP is the primary steward of over 80 acres of green space across Highbridge Park, Sherman Creek Park, and the Harlem River Greenway. Once littered with tires, abandoned cars, and mountains of trash, NYRP has led extensive ecological restoration efforts to revitalize these important urban forest and wetland ecosystems for almost 30 years.

Invasive species removal and tree planting and care are key strategies in NYRP's long-term investment in these historically underserved landscapes. With the help of hundreds of corporate and community volunteers this past year, we planted more than 1,000 trees and shrubs throughout our parks, which included reforesting 2.5 acres in Highbridge. "This is an area where we essentially created forest," says NYRP Director of Northern Manhattan Parks Jason Smith.

One of our most dynamic restoration projects is on the Harlem River shoreline at Sherman

NYRP vigorously monitors and removes invasive species in more than 80 acres of Northern Manhattan parkland. They can suffocate entire forests when left unchecked.

1,182
trees and shrubs
planted in parks
1,510
parks volunteers

86,565 pounds of trash removed



The Sherman Creek Park waterfront along the Harlem River in the mid-1990s was severely eroding and littered with debris before NYRP's intervention.

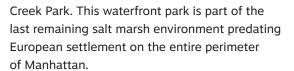






NYRP planted 1,182 trees and shrubs throughout our parks with the help of hundreds of community and corporate volunteers this past year. Here, volunteers from Bloomberg help plant trees in Highbridge Park.

In 2023, researchers observed that the living shoreline marsh habitat installed by NYRP along the Sherman Creek Park waterfront is removing nitrogen pollution from local combined sewer overflows at a rate that rivals or exceeds nearby unrestored marshes in this critical ecosystem service.



In response to years of erosion and decline of the historic marsh, NYRP collaborated with NYC Parks in 2020 to successfully install a living shoreline: a 500-foot artificial oyster reef with expanded marsh grass plantings. This project helps protect the park from sea level rise and wave action, provides habitat for wildlife, and serves as an example of nature-based climate adaptation.

The project's growth and development have been thrilling to watch; the new marsh is already matching the existing marsh in its capacity to remove nitrogen pollution, which is primarily caused by sewer discharges, from the river. Furthermore, previous work has shown that the restored marshes in Sherman Creek Park rival or exceed nearby unrestored marshes in this critical ecosystem service.

Additionally, the marsh's rapid growth represents carbon dioxide—the primary cause of the climate crisis—that has been removed from the atmosphere at the site, some of which will be stored in the marsh sediments. This contributes to long term carbon sequestration at the site if we keep our marshes thriving.

"For a newly restored marsh to have this level of function is genuinely surprising," observes Jason. "In addition to keeping the shoreline intact, our project is removing some of our most harmful pollutants from our local urban environment, too."



Last fall, NYRP partnered with USDA-NRCS to map the wetland soils along Sherman Creek Park. The soil mapping is the first of its kind in Manhattan, and part of a larger Coastal Zone Soil Survey federal initiative that aims to effectively study, manage, conserve, and sustain our nation's vital shallow - sub tidal ecosystems.

# **Stewarding GARDENS**

More than 1.6 million New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a NYRP green space. This includes the 52 community gardens we own and operate throughout all five boroughs (pg. 4), with larger clusters of spaces concentrated in the South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, and Central Brooklyn.

We leverage our resources to provide regular, year-round maintenance and seasonal program support, ensuring our portfolio gardens are consistently clean, safe, accessible, and activated with events tailored to their communities. "NYRP's garden support is comprehensive," says Public Programming Coordinator Mike Horwitz.

Concretely, this means that NYRP's Operations crew makes weekly rounds to all our gardens to clean up litter, care for street trees, and maintain essential infrastructure. Beyond this basic maintenance, our Engagement & Programming team works directly with our more than 700 gardeners to offer community engagement support; provide equipment as needed; and help organize meaningful public events.

52 community gardens

245 free public programs

7,000 event attendees



For Black Birders Week

2023, our Aberdeen Community Garden in

Bushwick, Brooklyn

NYC Audubon, and

birdwatching walk.

Evergreens Cemetery to host neighborhood

partnered with Council Member Sandy Nurse,



Back-to-school supply giveaways are some of our most popular events every season. People lined up down the block for this past year's event at Essex Street Community Garden in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn.



Our Home Depot Children's Garden in East Harlem organized many kid-friendly programs this past year including an Easter egg hunt, Halloween party, and regular arts and crafts events.



NYRP's El Cataño Community Garden in East Harlem is one of our most programmed spaces. In addition to their legendary Puerto Rican Day Parade party every June (pictured here), they organize and host fitness classes, health events, and story hours with the local library branch.



Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden is another one of our standout spaces in East Harlem. In addition to focusing their group efforts on improving the urban agriculture production this past year, they hosted several community programs including a popular terrarium-building workshop.

"We engage with groups to collaboratively conceive and help execute programming to fit the needs of the garden and the wider community," adds Mike.

From April through October, NYRP supported more than 245 public programs and events for 7,000 community members. This included providing funding, equipment, promotion, and/or planning support for everything from free back-to-school giveaways and fitness events to art classes and movie nights.

"It was a really successful season for many community garden groups," says Senior Engagement Manager Jessica North. "There were more events in our spaces this past year than any other since the beginning of the pandemic."

One of the greatest achievements of the season was completing the renovation of Clinton Avenue Community Garden in The Bronx to rebuild garden beds, build a shade structure, install an in-ground water system, and mount a high tunnel to extend the growing season. The garden has functioned more like an urban farm for years, producing hundreds of pounds of fresh produce for the gardeners and greater community.

"I save money and my food has better flavor," says longtime garden coordinator Elvia Campos. "And I simply just love how beautiful it is."





NYRP works with many groups to program free fitness events every year including our Jane Bailey Community Garden in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Weekly pilates classes led by the Fit In last summer were almost always at capacity.

For a full list of NYRP parks and gardens, visit nyrp.org/gardens



NYRP's annual Fall Fest at Sherman "Shriek" Park is

one of our most popular

pumpkin decoration, and a magic show, the 2023

event welcomed over 530

community members.

events of the year. Featuring NYC Parks Rangers,





### 2023 NYRP COMMUNITY GARDEN ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the end of every season, NYRP's Engagement & Programming team acknowledges the groups that went above and beyond to serve their communities. We were proud to recognize the following gardens this past year.

### **BEST PROGRAMMING**

El Cataño Community Garden 171 E. 110th St., Manhattan (East Harlem)

Essex Street Community Garden 3030 Fulton St., Brooklyn (Cypress Hills)

### MOST OUTSTANDING

**Aberdeen Community Garden** 91 Aberdeen St., Brooklyn (Bushwick)

### MOST IMPROVED

211th Street Block Association Community Garden

735 East 211th St., The Bronx (Williamsbridge)

### **ROOKIE OF THE YEAR**

**The Home Depot Children's Garden** 421 E. 117th St., Manhattan (East Harlem)

### **URBAN AGRICULTURE**

**Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden** 437 East 114th St., Manhattan (East Harlem)

# Free Tree GIVEAWAYS

New York Restoration Project's free tree giveaway program has a dedicated following. Since its start in 2008 as part of the MillionTreesNYC initiative, NYRP has distributed over 70,000 trees across the city. Fifteen years later, registration still fills up quickly, and people travel across boroughs to get the tree they want. "Turnout compared to last year substantially increased," says NYRP's Public Programming Coordinator Mike Horwitz.

With the generous support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, NYRP hosted 20 individual giveaway events to distribute 3,500 trees across the five boroughs from mid-April through May. We continued to rely on strong relationships with grassroots organizations to help give out the saplings including community gardens, museums, nature conservancies, libraries, and—thanks to a strong partnership with Citizens—local bank branches.

One of the program's main goals every year is to reach neighborhoods with the least amount of tree canopy. In addition to being more likely to suffer higher temperatures, these areas are more vulnerable to extreme weather events since they lack trees to help mitigate storm water and flooding. For these reasons, we were especially proud this past year to have distributed almost 100 trees—more than in any other neighborhood—throughout the Rockaways, one of the few areas of the city to lose canopy cover over the last decade.

Another mission of the program is to help increase the city's biodiversity by distributing almost 30 different native tree species best suited for our changing climate. Trees like the American Persimmon, Sweetbay Magnolia, and White Fringe Tree, for example, are not only great for pollinators and birdlife, but also well-equipped to thrive as our city becomes hotter and wetter. "There's really nothing trees don't make better," says Mike.

We are grateful to the following elected City and State officials who joined us in the field: City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams; Council Members Shekar Krishnan, Lincoln Restler, Rafael Salamanca Jr., and Selvena Brooks-Powers; State Senators Kevin S. Parker and Jamaal T. Bailey; State Assembly Member Nily Rozic; and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine.

NYRP's tree giveaway event with the Jackson Heights Beautification Group in Travers Park, Queens.





NYRP's tree giveaway event at the Wyckoff House Museum in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

free tree giveaway events

28
different tree species

3,500 trees distributed in 2023



NYRP tree recipients at the Wyckoff House Museum also received a free bag of compost.

# Urban AGRICULTURE

NYRP Director of Urban Agriculture Corey Blant (left) assists with the endof-season ginger harvest at Union Settlement in East Harlem.

For three years and counting, NYRP's Urban Agriculture program has helped our citywide gardener network grow to their greatest potential. This includes advising the more than 700 gardeners who are active in our 52 portfolio gardens, as well as growers affiliated with our 17 Gardens for the City partners (pg. 11), whose spaces we either built from scratch or renovated over the previous calendar year.





Gardeners pick up free seedlings distributed by NYRP's **Urban Agriculture** program at Aberdeen Community Garden in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Urban Agriculture team members Rhys Bethke, Genevieve Harding, and Camille Oldani install a drip irrigation system at Riley-Levin Children's Garden in Northern Manhattan's Sherman Creek Park.



Director of Urban Agriculture Corey Blant believes we have achieved this goal by meeting gardeners where they are. "So many of the gardeners we work with have deep agricultural roots," says Corey. "Whether someone is growing food for the first or hundredth time though, our NYRP Urban Agriculture team is here to help people make the most of their space."

Thanks to generous grants from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and other supporters, NYRP taught 165 food production classes, skill shares, and hands-on technical consultations in 2023 alone. Our team also distributed thousands of plants and seedlings to growers in all five boroughs while providing instruction in multiple languages including Spanish, Bengali, and Cantonese as needed.

Helping install irrigation systems across six different spaces was a season highlight; many of the city's gardens lack easy access to water and any assistance is in high demand. Most of the new systems have WiFi-enabled timers that can be activated from a phone app. This remote control can be a gamechanger in the hot summer months since someone doesn't always have to physically be in the space to water.

"As with all our work, we want these systems to work for both people and plants," says Corey.

> full-time staff members

workshops, skill shares, and technical consultations

> urban growers helped

# **Building GREEN SPACES**

Since it began over a decade ago, NYRP's Gardens for the City (GFTC) program has completely renovated or built over 300 green spaces throughout New York City. This includes 17 new gardens in 2023 alone, with at least one in every borough.

The program is community-driven: interested groups with available open space can apply to NYRP for free garden design consultation, materials, and labor to help achieve their vision. NYRP then prioritizes applications from the city's least green and historically most underserved neighborhoods. Property types where we ultimately work span almost every gathering space imaginable including existing gardens, schools, parks, courtyards, houses of worship, assisted living facilities, and multiple rooftops.

NYRP's Director of Garden Horticulture & Citywide Greening Projects Jason Sheets has led the program since it began. He's seen many changes over time but believes that 2023 marked one of GFTC's most notable evolutions to date thanks to the full incorporation of NYRP's urban agriculture consultation for partners. Once the GFTC crew finishes a build or renovation, the

partner can choose to opt-in to a year of free, personalized urban agriculture guidance from NYRP-and most do.

This integrated programming took on a new scale this past year with the renovation of New York City's largest community garden, Bissel Gardens, in the Wakefield section of The Bronx. The project was GFTC's largest renovation to date, covering most of Bissel's 2.5-acre property.

With the support of the Viking Global Foundation and the help of a stellar crew of over 180 Viking volunteers over three weeks last September, NYRP removed trash, planted perennials, supplied clean soil, and laid the foundation for NYRP's urban agriculture consultation in 2024.

"The work that was done at Bissel Gardens is beautiful," savs Maria Frias-Fitzsimmons, a Wakefield community member. "NYRP was here for a few weeks and was able to do what no one could. Bissel Gardens finally looks like a little piece of paradise."

"The Bissel Gardens renovation was a milestone for the Gardens for the City program," reflects Jason. "Bissel is the largest community garden in the city and needed some major infrastructure improvements, and NYRP delivered. I think our efforts combined with Viking's support and volunteers and the wants and needs of the garden group coalesced in a really nice way in this project. I can't wait to see what we accomplish as we partner on urban agriculture this coming year."

new raised

beds

volunteers

engaged

Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush branch before NYRP's renovation.

Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush branch after NYRP's renovation completed with the assistance of National Grid volunteers.



Community members assemble for planting and a ribbon cutting at Brooklyn Public Library's Flatbush branch.

# 2023 **GARDENS FOR THE CITY Projects**

NYRP's Gardens for the City program worked with the following community partners to revitalize their outdoor spaces in 2023:

### THE BRONX

Bissel Gardens (Wakefield)

Daly Avenue Community Garden/Perry's Garden (Crotona)

Niño de la Caridad (Fordham)

PS 360 (Kingsbridge Heights)

### **BROOKLYN**

Amboy Street Community Garden (Brownsville)

Brooklyn Public Library—Flatbush (Flatbush)

John Dewey High School (Gravesend)

Liberation Diploma Plus High School (Coney Island)

Lutheran Social Services of New York (Boerum Hill)

Success Community Garden (New Lots)

Wolcott Street Farm (Red Hook)

### **MANHATTAN**

Encore Community Services (Hell's Kitchen) Garden of Perseverance (East Harlem) The Lower Eastside Girls Club (Lower East Side)

### **QUEENS**

34th Avenue Medians (Jackson Heights)

### **STATEN ISLAND**

Alice Austen House Museum (Rosebank) Skyline Playground Community Garden (New Brighton)



Bissel Gardens-New York City's largest community garden-before and after NYRP's renovation



The Daly Avenue Community Garden (Perry's Garden) before and after NYRP's renovation





# Corporate VOLUNTEERING

### BLOOMBERG

In a single day last October, volunteers from Bloomberg helped NYRP plant 165 native trees in Northern Manhattan's Highbridge Park. These native trees are essential to the health of our urban forest and make New York City more resilient in the face of climate change.



### **NATIONAL GRID**

Volunteers from National Grid helped NYRP prune trees, clear pathways, spread fresh wood chips, and weed garden beds at our Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson Community Garden in Jamaica, Queens in early fall.





### BLACKSTONE

Blackstone joined forces with our team to bring a refresh to 103rd Street Community Garden, one of our portfolio gardens in East Harlem. Volunteers planted shrubs, built several new garden beds, painted fences, spread fresh soil. cleared trash from the space, and weeded garden plots.



### CITIZENS PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION

Throughout the year, volunteers helped NYRP staff run community events in our parks and gardens across the city. Here, employees from Citizens Philanthropic Foundation prepare for a movie night and free school supply giveaway at Essex Street Community Garden in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn in August.

### VIKING GLOBAL FOUNDATION

Viking Global Foundation, a longstanding NYRP partner, always takes on the most ambitious garden transformation project we offer each season. In 2023, this meant helping



renovate New York's largest community garden, Bissel Gardens, in the Wakefield section of The Bronx. Throughout September, over 180 Viking volunteers helped NYRP plant 125 perennials and 34 shrubs, install 63 garden beds, and construct four shade structures, 15 benches, and six trellises in this 2.5-acre garden.



### **UBS**

NYRP stewards Manhattan's largest remaining wetland, located in Inwood's Sherman Creek Park. This year, volunteers from UBS helped us restore our living shoreline and surrounding nature trails by removing litter, laying down fresh wood chips, and tending to wetland flora in August.

### **GOLDMAN SACHS**

Each year, Goldman Sachs generously provides sponsorship and volunteer support for our Gardens for the City program. They also complete numerous stewardship projects in our parks and portfolio gardens including the Target Bronx Community Garden, pictured here.



### **DELTA AIR LINES**

Volunteers from Delta Air Lines weeded and mulched the educational garden area at Monsignor Scanlan High School in The Bronx, one of NYRP's Gardens for the City Partners.



# CHANGENATORS

### **BNP PARIBAS**

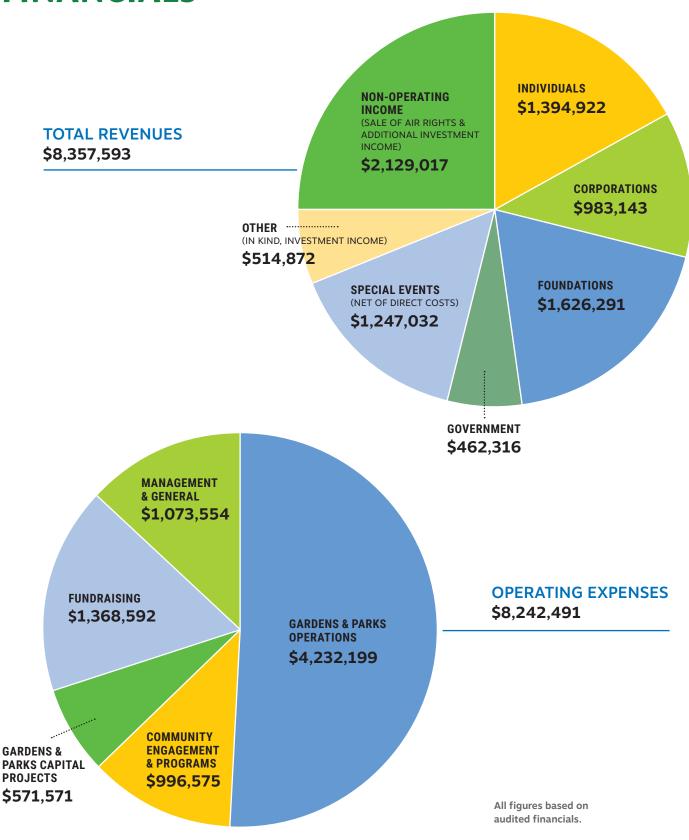
At Bathgate Community Garden in The Bronx, employees from BNP Paribas spent a fall day removing invasive vines, weeding garden beds, painting tables, and creating fresh wood chip pathways throughout the space.



### **BANK OF AMERICA**

Various groups of Bank of America volunteers helped restore the lower regions of Highbridge Park by pulling out harmful invasive species and planting flood resistant native species. Here, volunteers remove a tarp filled with pounds of weeds.

# 2023 **FINANCIALS**



# 2023 SUPPORTERS

Equitable access to green space has never been more important. We are grateful for our many generous donors who hold this conviction as strongly as we do.

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Left to right: Trustee Erhard Marius, Trustee Todd DeGarmo, Executive Director Lynn Bodnar Kelly, Board President Vered Rabia, Chief Advancement Officer Erica Helms, Ruth Marius, and Trustee Heather Butts attend a spring cocktail fundraiser on Wednesday, May 17.

**Board Co-Chair Darcy** Stacom (left) with Hulaween 2023 Green Goddess Honoree and Trustee Krystyna Blakeslee.



**Board Co-Chair Samuel** M. Ashner (center) and quests attend Once Upon a Hulaween: Scarytales and Deadtime Stories on Friday, October 27.





Trustee and Chairman's Council Chair Janice Parker (right) and husband Jim White attend Hulaween.

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**Board President Vered Rabia** attends Hulaween.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Harry Guinness, Trustee Sophie von Haselberg, Kelly Ripa, and Hulaween 2023 Green God Honoree Bruce Bozzi at Hulaween.

Fund





Darryl Pardi

Hulaween 2023 Wind Beneath My Wings Honoree Clive Davis (seated on right) and guests.

Hulaween Costume Contest Judge Jordan Roth (left) with STUDIOS Architecture, the Best Group Costume winner.





Trustee Kelebohile Nkhereanye (right) and wife Renee Boyd at Hulaween.

Trustee Todd DeGarmo (standing in white suit) attends Hulaween with STUDIOS Architecture.



Janice Parker Landscape Architects

Bob Pascucci

Benj Pasek

Patagonia

Elizabeth T. Peabody

Sina Pearson

Barbara Perrier

The L.E. Phillips Family Foundation, Inc.

Nancy and Fred Poses

Posner-Wallace

Foundation

Sally Pritchard

Proskauer Rose LLP

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