

Brown Family Environmental Center

at Kenyon College

Field Notes



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The BFEC Turns Twenty

This fall, the BFEC is celebrating twenty years since its doors opened in October 1995. Travel with us as we peer into the BFEC's past and why its mission is more important now than ever.

In the long run, twenty years is modest period of time, a measly span within Kenyon's almost 200-year history. Yet on a personal scale, twenty years ago can feel surprisingly distant. It's long enough for an infant to hopefully become an adult, or a newly minted adult to mysteriously find herself entering middle age.

I was a sophomore attending Kenyon when the BFEC opened and confess that the details from that era are a bit fuzzy in my now middle-aged brain. The BFEC's 20th anniversary offers us a good reason to look into the past and celebrate how the BFEC has grown up, to revisit why it was created and why its mission is more important now than ever.

A Nature Preserve Is Born

Like most great things, it started with a vision. This one belonged to Kenyon President Phillip Jordan, who served for twenty years starting in 1975. With a life-long interest in the environment, President Jordan envisioned a land lab for academic work and a place for students and community to experience the fullness of life in nature. What better way to study and enjoy ecology than through first-hand experience, with the boundless interactions of organisms fluttering around you? With Kenyon's surround of forest and farm, it seemed like a perfect fit.

The vision blossomed when President Jordan shared it with Earl Raymond

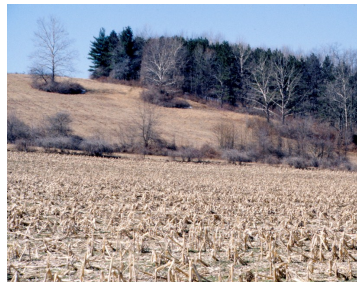
"Ray" Heithaus '68 and his wife Patricia as they joined the Biology Department faculty in 1980. A potential site popped up in the late 1980's, when the college purchased the Maxwell Farm, on which the BFEC house, gardens, prairie, and pine woods now stand, in an effort to preserve the area's rural character.

Ray dove into planning a land lab and nature center from scratch, working with Kathy VanAlstyne, a then-member of the Kenyon biology faculty, and others to put the vision down on paper. It being way back in the Dark Era Before GIS, mapping was literally on paper: 3 x 5' sheets of transparent acetate that could be drawn on and layered. What habitats would be the most useful for con-

An Early BFEC Photo Timeline



The Maxwell Farm, shown here in 1965, was purchased by Kenyon in the late 80's. BFEC student managers now live in the house, and the Kokosing Gap Trail follows the old tracks.



Before it was planted with prairie grasses and flowers in 1997, corn grew in the field behind the BFEC house.



The Kenyon Center for Environmental Study was dedicated in October 1995. Elizabeth Webb stands far right and Kenyon President Robert Oden, center.



Creating the garden in 1996: Pat Heithaus and Ruth Woehr.

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ervation of species, and for learning? Where were the best spots to plant forests or build ponds?

With support from President Jordan, they hired a consultant to help them map their new baby. They also conceptualized how it would be used and by whom, crafting a three-part mission of conservation, supporting student research and community outreach that continues to propel the BFEC today.

Their plan was approved by the College trustees, and with another round of support from President Jordan, a part-time faculty director, Elizabeth Webb, was hired. The center opened its doors in October 1995, though for the time, under a different name: the Kenyon Center for Environmental Study.

A Mission With Roots

Like other organizations that conserve natural areas, it's something that we do for nature's own sake, because we believe that natural diversity should survive. It probably goes without saying that we are motivated by fascination and awe, and a love for its shapes and colors and charismatic animals.

When the BFEC committed to community outreach, it sought to share the preserve as resource, to make it widely available for learning and enjoyment. School groups started visiting within a year under the able hands of the BFEC's second director and former classroom teacher, Inese Sharp. Taking children outside felt

like the right thing to do and was a powerful way to teach adaptations and life cycles, habitats and food webs.

But for college students and children alike, our educational mission is intertwined with philosophy and the practicality of needing to conserve natural areas for our own survival.

Allowing people to experience what is special about a particular place, to know its fullness of life and to feel a part of it, is deeply grounding. Especially when working with youth, we design activities to feed underlying curiosity with direct sensory experiences, such as hiding in the dark, damp grass during a food web game at camp, holding a wriggling frog, or knowing the hush and smell of the pine woods. (It smells exactly the same to me now as it did twenty years ago when the trees were just 5 feet tall).

Through these experiences, we not only provide context for learning that allows concepts to stick, we help young people develop a level of consciousness about the environment, followed by ownership and commitment, which may then extend further afield to habitats near and far.

David Sobel writes in his book *Beyond Ecophobia* that "the key is allowing for a close relationship to develop between children and the nature near home before laying the weight of the world's plight on their shoulders. Once children feel connected to nature and 'the environ-

We need young people to care for our world for the benefit of all, but in order to do so, they must know and love it first.

ment', physically and emotionally, they'll be compelled to seek the hard facts, take vested interest in healing the wounds of past generations while devising feasible sustainable practices and policies for the future."

Kenyon College is perfectly suited to facilitate the latter half of this equation. With a liberal arts approach of studying broad topics and their interconnectedness, students prepare to address entangled webs of environmental problems, which are layered with psychology, technology, politics, science, economics and history.

Many students we've known over the years have told us that the BFEC, as a living laboratory and nature preserve at Kenyon's doorstep "is the reason I came to Kenyon." They also are a case study in another need for green space: our health. They tell us that the preserve offers a space to be away from the concentrated stress of academic and social life. But isn't



The multi-talented Professor Tim Shutt leads a bird walk along the Kokosing Gap Trail near the BFEC in 1996.



The pine woods were planted in 1990, and used for student biology research, pictured here in 1997.



Signage celebrated the Kokosing River's new "Scenic River" status in 1998. Pictured left to right: Ohio Secretary of State Bob Taft, Doug McLarnan, Bob Gable of ODNR, Ray Heithaus, and Kenyon President Robert Oden Jr.

the need to unplug and relax true for all of us?

With the chronic diseases of our time a result of sedentary, over-stressed lifestyles, the research about nature as a powerful cure is piling up (see slate.com July 25, 2014 article as an example: “Doctors prescribing a walk in the park”). With access to it, we not only fight obesity and heart disease by simply moving, we fight depression and anxiety; we elevate cognition and social behavior. At times, it’s like dissolving that little black cloud hanging overhead.

For hyper-energetic children, the soothing effect can seem almost magical. Ask Lori Zolman, Mount Vernon kindergarten teacher and instructor for nature camp at the BFEC, held in partnership with SPI Spot. When she took twenty-seven kids outdoors in June for self-directed exploration, “they engaged so fully and seamlessly that it didn’t feel like work.”

As if fighting chronic diseases wasn’t important enough, we haven’t even touched the need for green space for the very elemental needs of clean air and clean water. In short, we need young people to care for our world for the benefit of all, but in order to do so, they must know and love it first.

Adaptation

After the center opened in 1995, new features were added in rapid fire. Blazing trails and creating a butterfly garden began quickly, with Pat

Heithaus and many volunteers providing much of the sweat equity. Where a cornfield once stood behind the house, a prairie was seeded in 1997 with help from volunteers Guy Denny, Stu Schott, and Mike Dailey. An advisory board was created in 1997, along with regular public programming. With Ray and area resident Doug McLarnan doing much of the footwork, the Kokosing River was designated as “State Scenic.”

In 1998 and 1999, thousands of trees were planted to expand the wooded corridor along the Kokosing River, a few by my own hands. Ponds were created for student research, and Girl Scouts constructed fifteen nesting boxes to begin the bluebird trail which now numbers thirty-eight boxes. Kenyon students were involved along the way in the work, plus through the rigor of classes and the fun of hikes and art contests.

According to Ray, the founders were surprised by how quickly community outreach programs grew as school field trips poured in. It soon became clear that the original house, which was being used as an office, student manager residence, and public program space, was inadequate.

The Minigowin Foundation stepped in with an endowing gift in honor of the Brown Family (see page 5), and Kenyon Center for Environmental Study became the Brown Family Environmental Center. The Advisory Panel raised another \$500,000, with the help of a sizable contribution from the Ariel Foundation and CEO

Karen Buchwald Wright, to build the resource center, which opened in 2001. The Minigowin Foundation gift also allowed the BFEC to build staffing, who were (and are) the engines behind conservation and engaging people with nature.

The BFEC is now reaching more people and managing more trails and habitat than ever. We serve 5,500 people per year through public programs, field trips, trail races, photo contests, and other events. This does not include the hundreds of people who visit the BFEC’s gardens and seven miles of trail at their leisure to hike, relax, or picnic.

Since 1995, we’ve tallied some impressive numbers: 58 acres of restored wetland, forest, and prairie, 10,000 trees planted, nearly 1,000 bluebirds fledged, and 16,000 school field trip visits. The work has been possible through our donors and members, and of course, through the people with the vision and work ethic to get it started.

In looking back over 20 years, I asked Ray if he felt as if he and his many co-conspirators had achieved what they set out to accomplish. Without hesitation he replied “yes,” and that there were a few things that went above and beyond his expectations. “I hadn’t dreamed of this building,” he said, and the very quick response from the community to the need for more space.

He noted that there were a few small things in the initial plans that did



Students help plant thousands of trees along the Kokosing River.



Ron and Inese Sharp and Kenyon President Phil Jordan at BFEC advisory board meeting in 1999.



Ponds were constructed in 1999 for the study of aquatic biology. They now serve as home to seven species of frogs, and a place to explore food webs with elementary school field trips.

Good-bye BFEC (sort-of), Hello Green Initiatives

by Dave Heithaus



Seventeen days, seventeen attempts and seventeen fails have revealed that there is simply no clever hook for this quarter's column. In the interest of getting it to print before a meteor strike renders the point moot let's cut to the chase:

Despite every intention to remain BFEC Facility Director until they wheeled me out in a pine box (or straight jacket), I have accepted the position of Kenyon College's Director of Green Initiatives and will be moving on from what many insist is the "best job on campus".

A faculty member who must be considered Kenyon "Royalty" asks that students in a popular class write their own obituaries... or, if that's too taxing, an obituary for a friend's uncle's imaginary pet.

I never took that class. It always seemed to conflict with sleep, viewing of obscure 80's action comedies or exploring what was then a newish and freeish thing called 'the internet'.

Today, I am elated and saddened, excited and terrified to amend at

least a part of that oversight as I write of that big transition from life at the BFEC.

So what do you include in an obituary? The past certainly, but the future? I guess that depends on your particular take on the afterlife. As a non-denominational optimist and someone who values employment, both seem perfectly reasonable.

What can I say about the past?

Thanks I guess. The last nine years have been almost nine times longer than any previous period of employment and nine times more enjoyable than any of them. Except the one where I got to jump off of speed boats onto marine turtles. That was pretty awesome.

In all seriousness though, thank you. To everyone who has ever enjoyed a stroll on a trail, to everyone who sat quietly in Jill's garden. To Jill, to Heather, to all of our wonderful students, to the faculty of Kenyon College, to the college itself, to the Kokosing River Valley and all of Knox County- thank you for having me and allowing me to try in some small way to make your time outside an infinitesimally more enjoyable experience.

I will miss being the guy on the tractor but I am hopeful we can find someone younger who is also my superior in every way when it comes to being an interpretive naturalist. Since certain space-time paradoxes prevent us from kidnapping my father from the 1960's, we're looking for someone from *this* time instead.

So what does the future look like for the BFEC as we celebrate twenty years as a thing? What does it look like for the college as I turn in my short pants and t-shirts for long pants... and t-shirts (at least one day per week I'm hoping?)

For the BFEC, I have to believe the shift in roles will be a good thing. By shuffling or retaining some of my administrative duties and oversight (yes, some people *do* trust me), we have been able to create a position at the BFEC even better than my old one. Whoever we hire will be tasked with on-the-ground management and natural history programming: a Land Manager/Naturalist as we have advertised.

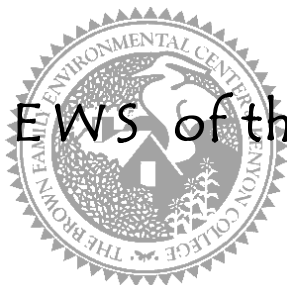
Having someone dedicated to land management without a substantial role in administration or coordination should allow for considerably more time to plan and implement natural history programming. It is our hope that the new hire will fill my shoes while contributing significant expertise to Heather's already robust programming efforts.

From an institutional level, the future also looks full of possibility. As Director of Green Initiatives, I have been tasked with the following by the office of the Provost (his words):

- serving as a liaison among and coordinator for Kenyon's centers, programs, and organizations involved with sustainability and the environment;
- promoting education across the College about the institution's sustainability efforts;
- overseeing land management at the BFEC, Kenyon Farm, Kokosing Preserve and other "off-campus" green spaces; and
- continuing to oversee facilities at the BFEC (without the time on the tractor or with chainsaw in hand that he currently enjoys).

I am tremendously excited to dive in across the board. There has been a growing interest in coordinating our various sustainability "silos" for some time. By creating this position, Kenyon College is committing to doing more than talk it over. Provided I can talk enough to make things happen...

There are too many facets to delve into effectively with my 1,000 words but I see the next several years as



Honoring the Brown Family

As we celebrate the BFEC's twentieth anniversary, we'd like to again recognize the Brown

Family, for whom the center was named when the Minigowin Foundation made a gift in their honor.

The gift memorialized Robert Bowen Brown, a 1911 graduate of the College who returned to Kenyon in 1941 to serve as its secretary. He also served as the dean, director of public relations, founding editor of *Alumni Bulletin*, and VP for development. Other members of the family memorialized by the gift are Robert Bowen Brown's wife, Frances Hearne Brown, their daughters Antoinette Brown Suter and Frances Brown Newell, and their sons Harry Whiting Brown II '37 and Robert Bowen Brown Jr., '40. Another member of the family, David Hearne Newell, grandson of Robert Brown and Frances Brown, is a 1975 graduate of Kenyon.

We are deeply humbled to continue to serve as a place to honor the Brown Family with our conservation efforts, and wish to thank them for being an integral part of our recent success.



A Great Table

During Kenyon's Reunion Weekend in May, we were proud to dedicate our newest feature in honor of the contributions of Ray '68 & Pat Heithaus to the Biology Department and the BFEC. A grand table that can seat up to 15 people for a class, meeting, or event now graces the lawn behind the BFEC house. Timmons Roberts '83 led the fundraising charge that enabled Tim Englert '83 to construct and install the table. If the design looks familiar, it's because you might have already seen it in bench form on our river trail. A second bench was installed on the river trail in June in memory of Andrew Bobik '00.

Continued from page 4 follows:

- Together with college operations, students, faculty and staff begin to identify what is and what *can be* "sustainability" at Kenyon College. As programs, behaviors and decisions are identified, I will endeavor to keep them moving along with an eye to how they might be incorporated into the curriculum.
- Create a land management plan that considers all of the college's off-campus green spaces in terms of effective management *and* utility to the college's academic mission.
- Actively promote these spaces and the organizations that use and oversee them as academic and community resources that can and should be actively (and creatively) taken advantage of. Not simply promote but bend over backwards to facilitate use as well.

Continued from page 3 not transpire – a large pond for instance, because the soils here would simply not support one. "But that's fine, you adapt," he commented. It is a naturally ecological view of the world from a person who has helped share – through the indoor and outdoor

I have a tremendous amount to learn and many, many people amongst the faculty, staff, student body and administration to learn from. I am hopeful; I am confident that by speaking together, thinking together and working together we can maximize the efficiency of our many component parts- not just objects, organizations and processes but each of us as individuals in a community of decision makers. I look forward to working with you all in this new role. For our students, for our community and for ourselves let's discover what sustainability really means at Kenyon and find a way that we can learn from it and all of the wonderful resources that make up this very special *place*.

Thanks to all and... Adios tractor... you will be fine in fresher hands...



classroom – the joys and necessity of nature with thousands of people, myself included.

Please see our next issue for more on how the BFEC's work has changed and where we're headed.



Calendar of Events

*All events are free, open to the public, and start from the BFEC Resource Center unless stated otherwise.
9781 Laymon Road, Gambier Ohio | 740-427-5050 | dohertyh@kenyon.edu | bfec.kenyon.edu*

Middle School Nature Club - July 16, 30 & August 13, 4:00 - 5:30pm

The BFEC is pleased to offer a break from the summer doldrums for kids who have finished 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Led by volunteers and Kenyon student staff, the club will focus on service projects, learning more about the great outdoors, and simply having fun. Activities may include wading in the river, hiking, invasive species removal, and hanging out with the BFEC's live animals. The club will meet every-other Thursday at 4pm; attending every meeting is not necessary. Please pre-register your child by emailing dohertyh@kenyon.edu, or calling 427-5052.

Wildlife Garden Tour - Thursday, July 16,

7pm. After the heat of the day has passed, take a leisurely stroll through the BFEC's Wildlife Garden with Kenyon Professor Emeritus Ray Heithaus. Our garden features over 60 species of plants that are native to the midwest. Learn how they support birds, butterflies, and bees and consider them for your own home garden.

Wolf Run Walk - Saturday, August 1, 1pm

Meet at New Gambier Road Trailhead. It's hot outside, which makes it the perfect time to explore the cool waters of Wolf Run. Walk approximately .75 miles on BFEC trails, then put on your old tennis shoes or water shoes to wade in and look for salamanders, small fish and bugs. The hike will cover 1.5 miles total.

The BFEC's New Gambier Road trailhead is located on New Gambier Road between S.R. 308 and Upper Gilchrist Road. From BFEC resource center, turn left onto Laymon Rd. Cross S.R. 229 and proceed up steep hill. Turn left onto S.R. 308 / Chase Ave. After about 1 mile, turn left onto New Gambier Rd. Look for trail head parking lot on left (south) side of New Gambier Road.



Join us on July 16th to witness the hard work of summer assistants who learn about conservation by making our native plant Wildlife Garden beautiful, along with working on trails, land management projects and public programs. Pictured above: Eleanor Lopatto '17 (center), JaeJune Lee '17 (right). Summer assistant Kate Nickley '16 is not pictured, nor their intrepid leader, facilities assistant Jill Kerkhoff.

20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION - Saturday, September 5th

It's been twenty years since the BFEC opened its doors in 1995, and you're invited to celebrate this milestone with us! Join us on the evening of Saturday, September 5th (time TBA) for FREE music, ice cream (while supplies last), dance performances and more.

Moonrise Hike - Saturday, September 26, 7:30pm

Join us for a moderate 1.5 mile hike for a view of the "Harvest Moon" rising over the Kokosing River valley. The Harvest Moon is the full moon that falls closest to the autumn equinox, and was named for allowing farmers to work into the night gathering their fall harvest. Gather around for a bonfire and s'mores after the hike.

Knox County Nature Photo Contest & Workshops

Photographs of our natural world remind us of the beauty to be found when we take the time to look. Community members of all abilities are invited to enter this photo contest in celebration of our scenic Knox County. Prizes awarded in children's (ages 15 and below) & adult divisions. Submission deadline is **October 12**; contest show during October 17 Harvest Festival. Guidelines coming soon to bfec.kenyon.edu, plus dates for Gund Gallery photography workshops.

Fall Harvest Festival - Saturday, October 17

Celebrate the season with this FREE family event. Activities include wagon rides, live music, kids harvest races, farm animals and produce, bonfire, cider press, pumpkin decorating with OSU Extension Master Gardeners, and the Knox County Nature Photography Contest show.

Thank You to...

Our Members *April-June*

PATRON

Geoffrey & Lori Brown
Margaret Newell

FRIEND

Meredith & Jay Bonham
Guy Denny

Kami & Eric Diehl
Royal Rhodes
Thomas Sant

FAMILY

Krista & Burke Howard
Pat & Bill McCulloh

INDIVIDUAL

Mary Ann & Graham Cursey
Shirley Hughes
Sally Mills
Barbara Walker-Simpson

Our Donors

Donation in memory of John E. Wagner, by Tom & Gloria Edwards

Donation in memory of Thadd Bowman, by C. Roberts Phillips

Bench donors in memory of Andrew Bobick '00:
Mary Archey, Jane Austin, Thomas Barnes, James & Sandra Bobick, John & Mary Jane Burin, Bob &

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Outdoor Classroom donors in honor of Ray & Pat Heithaus: Meryl Brott, Allison Cleary, David

Gifford, Lisa Harpring McLaughlin, Marcia Humes, Lisa King, Julie Kunz, Sascha Lodge, Brad Oberle, Diana Olinger, Kathy Pecht, Timmons Roberts, Sam Shopinski, Harvey Stephens, Mary Beth Stephens, Frank Tuttle, Annie Vlauska, Mark Walsh, Beth Welty Dreyfuss, Peter White, Alex Wright, Libby Wright, Jeff Zacharia, Anna Zimmermann

Our Volunteers

In the office, on the trails and in the garden:
Terri & James Heironimus, Jack Pillow, Shirley Hughes,

Earth Day Festival volunteers: Cayla Anderson, Nancy Chappel, Emily Erblich, Joia Felton, Terri & Mike Hillier, Harper Kerkhoff, Rebecca Metcalf, Courtney Neilson, Sean Patrick, Erin Salva, Diane

Stutz, Joanna Wong, and the members of Theta Delta Phi.

Field trip volunteers: Thank you to 39 community and student volunteers who donated 165 service hours to make spring field trips for 498 elementary school children possible!

Earth Day Challenge 1/2 Marathon: Our sincere thanks to the 250+ volunteers whose contributions made the event possible!

Bluebird Monitors: Kendrick Flanagan, Sarah Goslee-Reed, Keith Kitchen, Brian Miller & Keith Robinson

1,000 bluebirds raised
10,000 trees planted
16,000 school field trip visits

Do you need *more* reasons to give in honor of the **BFEC's 20th Anniversary?**

Ok, here's the most important one: feel the satisfaction of knowing you're a part of our critical mission of conservation and connecting people with nature. Plus, receive preferred access to popular workshops, a hard copy of our newsletters, and 10% discount on bird seed. Thank you!

Become a MEMBER

Membership level: Student ___ \$20 Individual ___ \$35 Name _____
 Family ___ \$50 Friend ___ \$100 Patron ___ \$250 Address _____
 Benefactor ___ \$1000 + City _____
 Amount enclosed: _____ State, Zip Code _____
 My check, payable to Kenyon College, is enclosed Telephone _____
 Please bill my ___ Visa or ___ MasterCard Email _____
 Card number _____ Exp. date _____

Mail to: BFEC, P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022

Your donation is tax deductible as allowed by law. The Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Brown Family Environmental Center at Kenyon College

9781 Laymon Road, Gambier, Ohio 43022 ~ (740) 427-5050 ~ <http://bfec.kenyon.edu>



Our Mission

The BFEC at Kenyon College exists to engage Central Ohioans of all ages with nature, and to support the goals of Kenyon College by conserving the natural diversity of the Kokosing River valley and providing opportunities for education and research.

Director of Facilities

David Heithaus

Director of Programming

Heather Doherty

Facility & Program Assistant

Jill Kerkhoff

Upcoming Events

Thursdays	July & August	Middle School Nature Club
Thursday	July 16	Wildlife Garden Tour
Saturday	August 1	Wolf Run Walk
Saturday	September 5	20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Saturday	September 26	Moonrise Hike
Monday	October 12	Photo Contest Deadline
Saturday	October 17	Fall Harvest Festival

Knox County Nature Photography Contest

Deadline: Monday, October 12

- * Prizes awarded * Novices welcomed
- * Adult & children's divisions
- * Contest rules at bfec.kenyon.edu



Events details inside and at bfec.kenyon.edu

Brown Family Environmental Center
at Kenyon College
P.O. Box 508, Gambier, Ohio 43022



