NYSOEA Annual Report 2020 (Preview)

New York State Outdoor Education Association

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[www.NYSOEA.org](http://www.NYSOEA.org)

Link to Board Members: <http://nysoea.weebly.com/board-of-directors.html>

**President’s Message**

2020 will certainly go down in history for so many reasons and outdoor educators will remember it as well...the year of anxiety, uncertainty, and re-invention.

I’m proud of the NYSOEA Board of Directors for holding a steadfast course for our organization with professionalism, stoicism, and a lot of heart.  We watched as our investments dropped and our plans were put on hold, all the while dealing with our own uncertainties in our personal lives.  Yet we held the course and the stock market bounced back. With New York on pause our programs events and all plans were on hold, yet we wanted to DO something to help our fellow outdoor / environmental educators that would not be hired or were furloughed.  So, a plan was hatched!

Our agreement to work with NYC-based EEAC was just the starting point we needed to create a joint fundraiser to help fuel an emergency scholarship fund for those in our field who needed it the most.  A committee was formed, fundraiser started, and people gave generously.  We don’t have any endearing stories yet from those we helped...hopefully they will be able to tell their stories in future Pathways articles... but I know it gave the Board a feeling of leadership in a time of seemingly helplessness.

This inspired a series of Zoom meetings to reconnect with our membership and let people share resources and ideas on moving forward during a pandemic.  You’ll see in the annual report the list of meetings we held with a few of summaries to give you an idea of the impact we were having.  And they were well attended.

The Pandemic Shutdown also revealed some changes that we would like to make for our main NYSOEA Office, currently in Cortland. We were physically separated from our files and phone and the duties of the office ground to a halt for months. Additionally, we have been having technical issues and glitches with various software that we use as NYSOEA moves forward into the digital age. In the final analysis, we need to change the nature of the job into more of an IT position as well as move it physically closer to the Metro Region where more Board Members could access our files, store, and archives. The Board will continue to transition the office into something that fulfills our current and future needs.

During some of my last Board meetings, I was inspired by seeing everyone’s faces during the virtual meetings.  This was my dream so many years ago when I signed on as President knowing that I would see the summary of the first 50 years and help transition NYSOEA into the next 50 years.  One of my goals was to get us meeting face to face virtually.  At first there were only 2 or 3 of us on camera but now our meetings are full of beautiful and hopeful faces on our Zoom calls.

And now my term has ended as I pass the NYSOEA gavel on to Rebecca Houser who is young, smart and already has a wonderful handle on the organization.  I step down knowing that we are in great hands and this new Board will continue to steer NYSOEA into a bright future.  I can’t wait to see what inspiring things they do next!

Sincerely

Eric Powers

President, NYSOEA

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**VP of Programs- Conference 2019 Report**

The 2019 Annual NYSOEA Conference was like no other, filled with deep conversations and inward reflection to embrace the difficult subject “*The Outdoors is for Everyone: Equity, Access and Inclusion in Environmental Education”.*It is hard to address the obvious disparities within the outdoor education community- a field of work that is predominantly made up of white middle class educators. The conference co-chairs River DiLeo, Marlena Vera-Schockner and Hannah Long, guided the conference attendees to embrace the discomfort and take the leap necessary in working towards a more inclusive and accessible future.

This groundbreaking conference took place at Sharpe Reservation's Camp Mariah in Fishkill, NY over the Halloween weekend of October 31st-November 3rd. The event kicked off with a costume party including some VERY creative outdoor-ed themed attire. The weekend continued with the highest attendance in recent years of around 220 people, including a mix of attendees from different backgrounds and ages. We had many new attendees sitting at tables and learning with friends that come year after year.

There were 35 workshops ranging from topics like how to make your facility more inclusive and how to collaborate with community partners to using accessible fishing equipment and using scientific drawing as a tool. The “Outdoors is for Everyone” panel discussion on Saturday morning was a big hit! The room was full, and the attendees were really engaged in the conversation- soaking up the wisdom from the panel while also learning from their mistakes. There was an emphasis on learning from others- we are not the only ones doing this work. Many others have had these difficult conversations before us, and we need to be open to listening and forming partnerships with allies across the state and across the country.

The Conference Chairs worked hard to find the perfect keynote speaker to both inspire and challenge us, Akiima Price. She was knowledgeable and funny while also appropriately critical of the outdoor & environmental education field. If you were unable to attend the conference this year, look her up and follow her Facebook group “Urban EE Collective” to get resources and learn more about her work.

It was so incredible seeing how many people were in attendance for the first time and hearing about what brought them in- the theme of “*Equity, Access and Inclusion in Environmental Education”.*We knew this topic would need to be approached carefully and thoughtfully, and to be honest we were all a little nervous to take it head on. We could not have done it without the courageousness of the Chairs, River, Marlena & Hannah and without the hard work of those that started tackling this issue long before it became a priority for NYSOEA. We will continue this discussion as a strand that will be woven into all future conferences and also commit to further our own education on these topics as the NYSOEA Board. We can all start with the “next steps” that the Chairs so kindly put together and can be found on the Resources tab of the NYSOEA website. We look forward to changing the heart of outdoor & environmental education to represent ALL of New York State and hope to see you all again at next year’s conference!

Megan Hoffman

VP of Programs

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**Equity, Access & Inclusion Committee Report**

More about: <http://nysoea.weebly.com/equity-access-and-inclusion-info.html>

EAI event details are listed below:

Allyship and Partnership, Sept 25th How to be a more effective ally and partner to fellow environmental educators that have historically been marginalized. The virtual event was fully booked, and we had registrants from 17 states across the United States who were interested in this topic! 56 people came for the actual zoom webinar, but all registrants received a recording of the event post the conversation. Speakers: Katina Grays, Volunteer Leader, Outdoor Afro; Taylor Morton, Environmental Health and Education Manager, WE ACT; Susan Hereth, Education Director, Kingston YMCA Farm Project

Zoom call hosted by EAI Committee, June 18th Session discussed best practices around creating equitable, digital EE programming within organizations. 53 members attended the event. This conversation was led after the George Floyd shooting, which was at the forefront of everybody’s mind. The committee wanted to discuss the implications of this tragic event in the EE field. Agenda followed addressed: 1)History of EJ and Suppression of the Outdoors in Black Communities 2)Infographic was shared with attendees: 7 Ways to Advocate and Educate for Environmental Justice 3)There are a lot of great virtual tools and apps to help people connect to nature in the absence of in-person education (iNaturalist, eBird, Litterati, etc.), but what do we do when our audiences don’t have access to internet & technology?

Christina Tobitsch

Metro Region Co-Director

**Environmental Educators Activity Exchange 2020**

 Thirty educators from Western and Central New York gathered together on January 28, 2020 for the annual NYSOEA Environmental Educator Activity Exchange. The event was hosted by the Buffalo Zoo and featured a short sea lion demonstration, tour of the polar bear exhibit, and presentation on threats to vulture populations worldwide. Throughout the day, 21 educators shared an activity or resource with the group and participants enjoyed traversing the universe as they explored eclipses and planets, singing along to new environmental songs, Great Lakes adaptions to classic games and microplastic investigations, EE program assessment resources, and much more. Participants also raised over $180 for NYSOEA camperships during the lunch-time raffle. There were many young faces in the group this year- it was exciting to see former interns from one organization working at another EE site and expressing a deep interest in the future of environmental education in New York.

Mary Ronan

Western Region Co-Director

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**Treasurers Report**

