Though Van Johnson III is one of the newest members of the Urban Ecology Center’s staff, he has big plans for what he hopes to accomplish in the community.

Van’s goal is to help blur the line between the urban world and the natural world and to help students in Milwaukee realize that both are one in the same. He admits it can be a challenging task at times with the current status of our environment.

“With all that is going on with climate change and environmental disasters, it can in a sense make the current generation jaded to what ecology really is. Is any of it really worth it? Sea levels are rising, temperatures are rising, hurricanes are happening every other week. It can be overwhelming.”

As a middle-school student, Van participated in the Urban Ecology Center’s Neighborhood Environmental Education Project (NEEP), where he was introduced to nature through hands-on field trips and experiences. Now, as a Community Program Educator at the UEC’s Washington Park Branch, Van is working to provide opportunities for children to connect with and learn from nature.

Through programs like the Young Scientist Club, Van is sharing his passion for the outdoors and helping to raise awareness about the natural spaces available to the community. The Young Scientist Club brings students to the Center to participate in environmental education adventures. The students learn to garden and prepare their own harvest, investigate science through fun interactive lessons, and enjoy the outdoors. All while creating a deep and personal connection to the natural spaces in their own neighborhood.

“Some people in these communities never leave and never get to see a space that is considered ecological or environmental, but those spaces are closer to them than they might think. And it’s our job to show them these spaces are here and accessible.”

Van believes programs that allow students to build a relationship with nature, like the Young Scientist Club, help educate the next generation of environmental leaders who will protect and save our planet. Through the support of donors like you, Van’s vision is coming to life through the UEC.
In September, the Urban Ecology Center's Board of Directors confirmed a new set of values to guide how our vision and mission are delivered. These values will inform our practices well into the future and we are excited to share them with our community!

The development of this succinct set of values was a team effort with the Center's staff kicking off the process by identifying values that embody who we are and who we want to be. Input from all-staff working sessions were organized into themes and refined by a smaller team.

We appreciate the input and guidance received from the entire Urban Ecology Center staff, board and the Values and Equity, Dignity, and Justice committees.

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Ken Leinbach, Executive Director

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DEFINING VALUES FOR GUIDING OUR WORK

**URBAN ECOPLOGY CENTER VALUES**

*Practice kindness*

*Nurture communities of belonging*

*Care for nature*

*Seek knowledge and inspire learning*

*Find fun and share it*

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EQUITY, DIGNITY, & JUSTICE IN AN IMPORTANT YEAR FOR SELF-REFLECTION

In January of 2020, the Urban Ecology Center worked with Ubuntu Research & Evaluation to conduct a “dignity assessment” of the Center. Ubuntu is a Milwaukee based, black women led organization that specializes in evaluation and strategy related to equity, dignity, and justice (EDJ). This assessment provided valuable feedback and guidance on where the Center should focus our efforts.

The Center’s long-standing EDJ committee, using both the Ubuntu Assessment and social justice conversations with staff, drafted an anti-racism and commitment statement. The commitment statement reflects the guidance from Ubuntu and was shaped with input from staff and the board, with a particular focus on centering the voices of staff who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

The Center continues to participate in learning opportunities related to equity, dignity, and justice such as the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge from Food Solutions New England, a training on bias from Guillermo Gutierrez, and a book club on “Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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LET’S GROW STRONG & MINDFUL LEADERSHIP IN A PANDEMIC

We have adapted, pivoted and learned so much since the start of the pandemic and are proud of how we’ve been able to continue to support and engage with our communities and neighbors during this uncertain time. Using our Gradual Restart of On-Site Work Procedure Manual (GROW), we have been able to slowly re-engage in on-site work in a safe way.

Based on the trends, we have re-prioritized our on-site initiatives to accommodate what the community needs most by focusing on supporting schools, caring for the land and providing opportunities for people to get outside to experience the healing powers of nature, helping with food security and doing what we can to help with childcare.

Throughout all of the changes, we honored a commitment to keep our staff safe, working, and paid. Our timing to return to on-site work and re-open our doors to the public is driven by public health indicators and guidance from the state and local health departments. We hope you continue to enjoy nature and each other -in a socially distanced way- in our greenspaces.

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Ken Leinbach, Executive Director
Take a look at the incredible impact your support made possible in the 2019-2020 year.

**Over 22,000 Neighborhood Environmental Education Project (NEEP) visits to our three branches!**

More than 200 blogs, videos, and activities were created by staff for this new virtual platform since March with 18,000 views!

100% of teachers reported that NEEP boosts student performance. In particular, teachers witnessed improvement in science skills like observing, communicating, classifying, inferring, measuring, and predicting.

More than 200 blogs, videos, and activities were created by staff for this new virtual platform since March with 18,000 views!

Rusty Patched Bumble Bees have been spotted at Riverside Park for the second time!

This bumble bee is classified as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, making this observation especially important.

This sighting is a testament to the work you support.

**The first-ever Urban Ecology Center Podcast was launched this year!** The podcast tells the ongoing story of the UEC through conversations with staff members, volunteers, and community members.

**100%**

**EVEN THROUGHOUT A CHALLENGING YEAR, THE URBAN ECOLOGY CENTER IS THRIVING - THANKS TO YOU.**

That translates to over 500,000 visits to our 3 branches.

**URBAN ECOLOGY CENTER IN MY BACKYARD**

Connecting you to nearby nature!

Park usage more than doubled!

The Urban Ecology Center is thriving - thanks to you! Even throughout a challenging year, the Urban Ecology Center is thriving - thanks to you.

Summer campers hiking up Coyote Hill in the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum at Riverside Park.
The Urban Ecology Center successfully weathered a challenging financial year in FY19-20. The COVID-19 outbreak in the United States caused significant business disruption with the closure of the three branches to the public in March. The UEC successfully secured a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan, which is expected to be forgiven in 2021. Additionally, the Center quickly transitioned to virtual programs, redeployed staff to essential work, and implemented a disciplined spending plan, resulting in a balanced budget of $4.48M. The Center remains committed to ensuring the long-term fiscal sustainability through shared attention on immediate fiscal needs and strategic planning for the future.

The Center carries no long-term debt. It only enters into agreements supported by existing pledges and donor contributions. The Board of Directors and Finance Committee maintain an intense focus on the adequacy of cash and oversight for all material financial aspects of the organization. The Center has a positive ratio of assets to liabilities and a broad donor base, ensuring a solid financial foundation for future growth. Our annual financial statements are audited by the Milwaukee based accountants of Scribner Cohen & Co.

Please visit our website at www.urbanecologycenter.org for additional information, including the IRS Form 990 and audit report.

Volunteers are at the core of the UEC’s operations. Despite reduced onsite volunteer opportunities this year, our volunteers contributed their time and expertise to help further our mission!

1,354 volunteers dedicated 8,241 hours to the Urban Ecology Center. That’s $211,464 of contributed labor!*

*Based on a $25.66 per hour value determined by Independent Sector for the state of Wisconsin.
The Urban Ecology Center thanks you, our generous donors, for your support in the 2019-20 fiscal year. For that reason, this year’s Annual Report lists our supporters alphabetically rather than by giving level. Every donation makes a difference and we are pleased to acknowledge the following donors for their generosity and support.

... (List of donors and their contributions)
Thank you to the following volunteers who contributed 10 or more hours of service to the Urban Ecology Center between September 1, 2019 and August 30, 2020. We are grateful for their gift of time and commitment to our mission.

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!

The Urban Ecology Center thanks you, our amazing volunteers, for your work in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

- Alveo College
- Anonymous (2)
- Brady Corporation
- Cardinal Stritch University
- Carnegie High School of Science and Technology
- Carroll University
- Corner Stone Church
- Dominican High School
- Empower Retirement
- Global Workplace Solutions
- Harley-Davidson Museum
- Hydrite Chemical
- Marquette University
- Milwaukee Center for Independence
- Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper
- Northwestern Mutual Foundation
- Operation Dream
- Pantheon Industries
- Rockwell Automation
- Senior Center

Every effort was made to ensure that this list of donors is accurate. If you made a gift between September 1, 2019 and August 30, 2020 and your name is not listed or is listed incorrectly, please contact Urban Ecology Center’s Development Office at (414) 964-8505.
GIFTS IN HONOR OF
Gifts given September 2019-August 2020 in honor of an individual.

- 15th Anniversary of Wisconsin Green Muslims
- Aleta & Walt Chossek’s 50th Anniversary
- All Kids
- Angela Carollo
- Black Lives Matter
- Bob & Lyn Slater
- Bob Peschel’s Retirement
- Brent Suter
- Brian Vleek
- David & Kathy Herrewig
- Eileen Griffin
- Else Ankel’s Birthday
- Erin Eregbu
- Father Doug Hennessy
- Fred Klusman
- Gene Lacznak
- Jennifer Callaghan
- Jerry Krause
- Kate Carollo
- Katie & Mark’s Wedding
- Ken Leinbach
- Kevin Klein
- Laurel Shanks
- Margot Fuchs’ Grandchildren
- Marilyn Hennessy
- Mark Horowitz - Retired MPS Teacher
- Mary and Ned Wrte
- Miss Alex LaBonte
- Monica Carollo
- Padrach Spence
- Paige Prillaman for her acts of social justice
- Pat Mueller
- Pau Aragon
- Penny and Finn
- Penny Cruse’s Birthday
- Peter Layde
- Phyllis Davidson
- Quinn Endres’ Birthday
- Rachel Nielsen
- Sally M. Tolan
- Susie Inbusch
- Susie Kasten’s Birthday
- Tim Ottman’s Birthday
- Tim Vargo
- Urban Ecology Center
- Walter Drefahl
- Anonymous
- Nancy Aten and Dan Collins
- Kat Grinker
- Nancy and Dick Spransy
- Margarete and David Harvey
- Lindsey Tauber and Sam Leichtling
- Sarah Tolan
- Chris von Briesen
- Petrovic Nature and Art Trust in the memory of Gayle Grubisic Riordan
- Ruth Zillman

GIFTS IN MEMORY OF

- Else Ankel
- Beloved brother of Jason Anderson,
  Shannon Aylesworth, Jon Broskowski,
  Aura Hirschman, Brenna Katch, and Laura Wick
- Kathryn Barbieri
- Terry Buckman
- Noel J. Cutright
- Joseph Ferschinger
- Jean Groh
- David Gronauer
- Gayle Grubisic Riordan
- John and Jane Henick
- Father of Megan Husband
- Jane Jensen
- Richard “Dick” John
- Steve Johnstone
- Miss Juneau and Miss Santly
- Teachers at Greenfield Elementary School 1936
- Martha Laubach
- Cathy Lemke
- Beverly Lustig
- F.J. “Red” Matzen
- Carol H. Mayes
- Harold Osten
- Jeff Pomije
- James Portofo
- Erwin “Erv” Russell
- Shirley Silko
- Bob Slater
- Mark Straube
- Harry F. and Patricia H. Weissberg
- Mary Winkelman Franke
- Les Young
- Ruth Zillman

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LEGACY SOCIETY
When you include the Urban Ecology Center as a beneficiary in your will, living trust, insurance, or retirement plan you help ensure that the UEC’s mission and your values continue into the future. We are pleased to recognize the following Legacy Society members who have made a lifetime commitment to the Urban Ecology Center.

- Anonymous
- Nancy Aten and Dan Collins
- Kat Grinker
- Nancy and Dick Spransy
- Margarete and David Harvey
- Lindsey Tauber and Sam Leichtling
- Sally Tolan
- Chris von Briesen
- Jim Schleif and Bill Morley
- Petrovic Nature and Art Trust in the memory of Gayle Grubisic Riordan
- Ruth Zillman

Interested in becoming a Legacy Society Member?
Please contact Jen Hense at jhense@urbanecologycenter.org or 414-626-8544 for more details.

A damselfly rests upon a blooming New England Aster in Riverside Park.
JOIN THE FUN! VIEW OUR FULL PROGRAM & EVENTS CALENDAR ONLINE

EQUIPMENT LENDING for MEMBERS
Members of the UEC can borrow equipment like cross country skis and snowshoes in winter and kayaks and canoes in summer for free, creating wonderful opportunities to explore our parks (and beyond)!

SUMMER SOLSTICE SOIRÉE
Summer 2021
Join us as we celebrate the 14th Annual Summer Solstice Soirée, a unique evening in celebration and support of the Urban Ecology Center.

HKE MKE 2021
Autumn 2021
Join us for HKE MKE! Our annual fall fundraiser takes you on a scenic hike through the heart of the city — with lots of fun stops along the way!

ONLINE:

Urban Ecology Center in My Backyard
Whether your “backyard” is a local park or connected to your home, we’re here to help make it your virtual UEC. We’re providing TONS of resources to help you enjoy your nearby nature: educational content for families, opportunities to contribute to research, and much more!

UrbanEcologyCenter.org/InMyBackyard

Photo by: UEC Environmental Educator Rob Dragani

Riverside Park
1500 E. Park Place
Milwaukee, WI 53211
(414) 964-8505

Washington Park
1859 N. 40th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53208
(414) 344-5460

Menomonee Valley
3700 W. Pierce Street
Milwaukee, WI 53215
(414) 431-2940

UrbanEcologyCenter.org