

2010 Annual Report



HANA AND ARTHUR GINZBARG

nature discovery center

Igniting life long curiosity,
understanding, and respect
for nature through education.



Fiscal Year Oct. 1, 2009 - Sept. 30, 2010



Metamorphosis 2009-2010

Director's Letter

The 2009-2010 fiscal year was one of challenge and change for the Nature Discovery Center.

We faced challenges resulting from a slow economy and new guidelines for fieldtrips and exhibit use by Houston Independent School District. We responded with new programs, new partnerships, a new look, and new ways of getting the word out, both in hard copy and digitally.

We added two new programs that, like our others, let children make their own investigations and discoveries. As they do, they discover their capabilities and build their knowledge base. Kids doing science is where curiosity develops into investigation, where interest grows into passion, and where affection evolves into stewardship.

We are excited about the coming year and hope that you will join us as we continue to provide Houston's children with science experiences that engage their minds, stimulate their creativity, and foster a positive connection with the natural world.

Jennifer Gillespie-Malone

We went LIVE with our new website on September 11, 2010. The new site features our brand new look as well as completely restructured navigation and new content sections. We are loving it, and the public response to our new site has been fantastic!



"The Nature Discovery Center brings children up close and personal with the natural world. Children learn about biology, geology, weather and everything in between. This agency offers schools a destination for field trips but it also offers afternoon and weekend activities for families and adults."

~ posted online by Gabriel

President's Letter

The Nature Discovery Center is proud to be a resource for our children and the community, especially at a time when public education is in crisis. The Center is an active learning place where the staff doesn't just bring science to children, they spark curiosity and a passion for seeking answers within children. That passionate, lifelong desire to learn is what creates innovative leaders and breakthrough science.

Despite the many changes and updates to the look of the Nature Discovery Center in 2009/10, a constant that will never go out of style are the skills of the staff. Hands-on education cannot be outsourced or learned from a lecture. Our classes and exhibits give children the opportunity to see nature and science for themselves, to create their own hypotheses, and to physically experience the lesson of the day.

The Nature Discovery Center has a long history of community support. This past fiscal year was no exception and, as a growing organization, we need to do even more to include you and to improve community participation. We have tremendous plans for this coming year, including examining options for enhancing our facilities, hosting family movie nights in the park, and holding the first Nature Discovery Center Fun Run. We look forward to your continued support and hope to see your family in Russ Pitman Park and the Nature Discovery Center soon!

Lynda Clemmons





Programs for Schools

Red Elementary's passing rate climbed to 96% after a year using our outreach presentations and exhibits.



Traveling Science Exhibits: Our seven classroom-sized interactive exhibits are loaned to schools for a month at a time. Students can investigate several regional habitats, animal adaptations, geology, and more. Each class can visit an exhibit several times. Our staff provides orientation and training for teachers, and TEKS correlations for all grades.

This year we completed work sheets for each exhibit in English and Spanish to help teachers guide students through exhibit activities and to track their progress in mastering the material.

Discovery Presentations: Live animals and real specimens engaged and entertained over 6,100 children in classrooms and libraries across the area. They enriched presentations and helped children understand how the lesson concepts apply to individual animals. Children examined turtles and snakes to discover common characteristics of reptiles, sorted vertebrates into groups based on skin covering, and helped figure out which small animals really belong to the "Insect Club."

Nature at Your Doorstep field investigations: We put elementary-age scientists in the field to collect data on biodiversity, the behavior of birds or squirrels, animal populations, insects, and more. Each NAYD unit incorporates math, language arts, and social studies to help teachers integrate science into their classrooms.

Science on the Go! This year we launched a new program of hands-on, in-class lessons in science topics for 3rd through 6th grades. Topics include: Photosynthesis, The Story of Life, and Archeology.

Teachers Say

"We loved the variety of areas that we could visit. The children enjoyed all of it. This is a wonderful center that so many children will enjoy for years to come."

~ Ms. Joann Hilton, Kids R Kids
Pearland

"Eric (the guide) did a great job explaining things on the kids' level. We thought it was terrific!"

~ Marcie Rosen, Crossroads School
2nd -4th grade

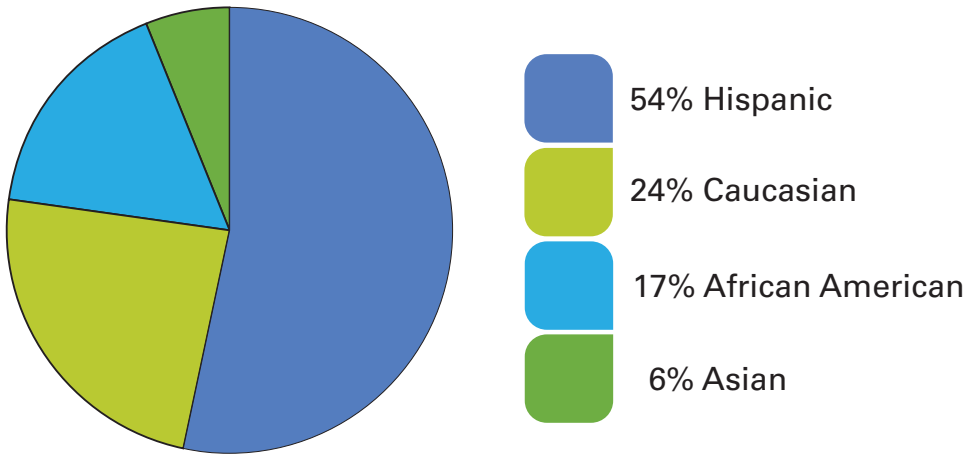
Students Say

"On other field trips, we don't get to write. It makes me feel like a REAL investigator."

~ Crawford Elementary School
Fourth Grader

In 2010, we completed correlations of all our school programs with the new **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)** for elementary science.

Demographics: Our programs for schools serve students across the greater Houston metropolitan area.



ExxonMobil Educator Workshops: We offer eight different workshops that include six national programs and two Nature Discovery Center programs, **Nature Detectives** for pre-school and kindergarten teachers and **Nature at Your Doorstep** field investigations for elementary school teachers. Participants learn how to lead students on outdoor field studies. They also learn ways to incorporate educational games and grade-appropriate experiments that support the TEKS into their curriculum. Over 160 teachers attended our workshops this year.



Participants Say

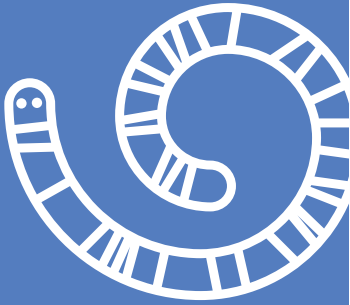
“Very good class! I will attend others and tell my friends about it.”

“Very good! I will definitely use these lessons in a classroom. Thumbs up!”

“I learned a lot that I could use in my future classroom.”

“I learned more about creating lessons that focus on students observing nature. I am going back with more knowledge and lesson ideas. I liked having the lessons broken down for us.”





Programs for Children

*6,000+ children
participated in our
childrens' programs
this year.*



Discovery Rooms: Our Discovery Rooms invite visitors to explore one of our Traveling Science Exhibits and check out science activities six afternoons a week free of charge.

The small Discovery Room held several new monthly themes this year ranging from life in the Ice Age to the natural history and geology of Hawaii. Visitors were treated to interactive exhibits, informative displays, make-and-take crafts relating to each theme, and to our permanent collection of live animals, puzzles, and Discovery Boxes.

Camps & Classes: Our year-round classes and seasonal camps give 3 to 10 year old children opportunities to examine, explore, and learn about nature in a safe and friendly environment.

Nature Story Time: A free weekly drop-in program with stories and crafts, Nature Story Time is a gateway to exploring nature for many families. Nearly 700 visitors dropped by for Nature Story Time this year, the largest number in 10 years

Scout Advancement Programs: We provide individual programs for girls and boys at each scout level to assist scouts and their leaders in attaining new skills and knowledge about nature-related topics. This year, over 200 boys and girls expanded their knowledge and developed new skills in our Scout advancement programs.

Birthday Party Programs: Whether they host a party at the Nature Discovery Center or at home – children can share a nature adventure with their friends in one of our birthday nature programs. Over 1,200 children met our animals during birthday celebrations this year.

Parents Say

“Connor really enjoyed the class this week. It was a memorable experience for sure.”

~ Julie, Summer Science Camp Parent

“This is the only camp my son wants to go to this year.”

~ Parent of a Science Camper

Scout Leaders Say

“We took our Daisy Scout troop here for an outing and the girls loved it. Would highly recommend”

~ posted online by tlea09

Nature Program Sampler: In response to a growing need for special programs for playgroups, this year we developed a Nature Program Sampler with themed activities that change monthly. We lead five to 15 toddlers and their moms or dads on a guided nature walk, share a story, song, or playtime, and visit the Discovery Rooms.

Scholarships: Thanks to numerous individual donations, this year the Edythe Fulton Scholarship Fund helped ...

- 5 young scientists attend Summer Science Camp
- 2 children attend a one day Spring Break Camps
- 62 second graders conduct outdoor field studies in Russ Pitman Park
- 4 low income classrooms participate in Outreach Presentations



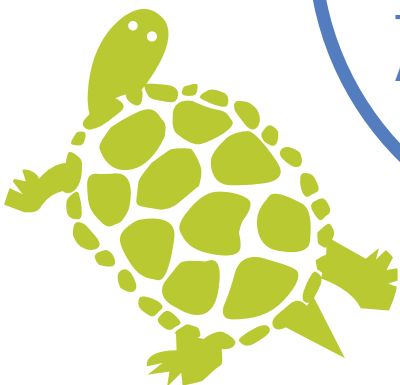
“Nature Discovery Center staff have planted so many seeds over the years and my daughters have each benefited tremendously. I too benefit, just watching them learn and grow in confidence.

The Nature Discovery Center, I believe, uniquely promotes creativity, questioning, and learning. The children explore, question, and figure out “on their own” from creating and observing.

Additionally, the way NDC approaches “teaching” builds self-confidence in the children ... they can ask the questions and find the answers – the self-confidence alone is a hugely important part of learning.

[The Center] has a unique approach that blends creativity, exploration, and confidence even in the early elementary ages. It is awesome to see some of the “blossoms” from the seeds planted over the years. You make a difference!”

**Thank you and take care!
Anonymous Parent**





Programs for Adults

We expanded both adult and family bird watching opportunities this year. We added an extra spring migration trip in April due to popular demand. We also scheduled a Fall Hawk Watch trip. Our trips now take advantage of the Harris County senior buses to reduce the cost for participants. Our popular **Lunch with the Birds** walks on Wednesdays at noon are open for everyone who wants to drop by and share an hour of birding during migration seasons. During the month of April, we added once a week evening walks.

We also co-sponsored four family-friendly chimney swift watching nights with Houston Audubon Society - in Sugarland, Bellaire, and Houston.

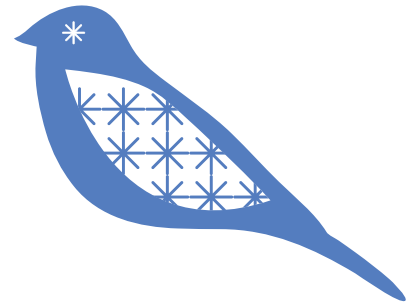
Birders Say

"I AM SO EXCITED THAT I AM GOING TO BE ABLE TO MAKE THIS TRIP!!! THANK YOU, THANK YOU FOR ADDING ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE OF US NOT ABLE TO BE INCLUDED ON THE FIRST TRIP!!!"

~ Shirley Nix

"I want to know about birds in the park, and you provide a nice service by emailing us. My husband Phil even came on Sunday with the promise that chances were very high he would see migrants. That was special, and you enabled it. It was fun seeing all the birders flock to the park for the migrants."

~ Paula



A new design for the park is in the works. Our Grounds Task Force has been working for over a year to develop a mission, vision and goals for improving Russ Pitman Park as a refuge for both wildlife and people.

Plans include expanding the pocket prairie and replacing non-native invasive plants with native species of trees, bushes, grasses, and flowering plants. Native plants serve as host plants for caterpillars and other insects and will increase the variety of colors, textures and aromas for visitors. The work done to date has already more than doubled the biodiversity of native plants and insects in the park.

There are now more recycling bins available throughout the park to make recycling easier for park visitors.

Visitors can easily keep up with Nature Discovery Center happenings by checking our information boards which are updated monthly.

Russ Pitman Park



Visitors Say

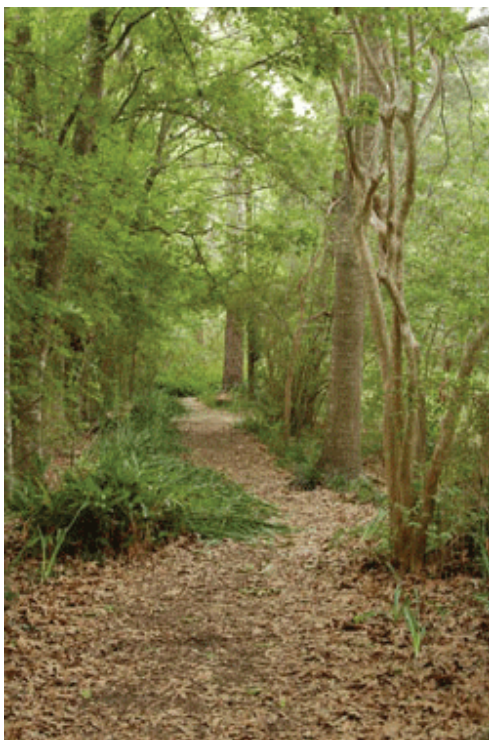
"This whole place and the park is wonderful for little minds. It's like leaving the city and going out into the country. A must-go place for people who want to teach their kids about nature."

~ posted online by
emeryandlilliesmom



"This is a great haven to escape to, and it is educational! Love this place..."

~ online post by helenh08



"Finally, a park that is a park! We picnicked at Russ Pitman a while back, walked around, and had a thoroughly lovely time. Friendly and knowledgeable Mary Ann, working on the pocket prairie, gave us a tour and answered all our questions. My sister had discovered the park last year as a site to go bird watching and informed me about it. We have since been getting into butterflies and were happy to see many flitting about the place. Congratulations are in order for creating such a wonderful jewel of a preserve in a massive urban landscape. I can't comprehend why every community doesn't desire (demand, even) such a park."

Thanks,
J. B. Sherrick
Chambers County, TX





Volunteers

Our largest volunteer program is for summer teen volunteers. This year 40 teens spent 2,100 hours working with summer camp and class participants and Discovery Room visitors, leading tours for visiting groups, caring for our live animals, and working on special projects for our exhibits and collections.

We improved and expanded the selection and training of summer teen volunteers and received more compliments than ever on the quality, leadership, and knowledge of teens leading groups on tours of the park and Discovery Rooms.

Visiting Groups Say

"Our guide really got the kids interested. We have come several times. Your guides made it fun for the children."

~ Ms. Maxine,
Children's Enchanted Learning Center

"The trips here have been really fun. We've had a great summer camp thanks to our visits to the Nature Discovery Center!"

~ Patty Clarke

Parents & Teens Say

"I just wanted to thank you for letting me volunteer at the Center this summer! I had a lot of fun and learned some new things! Once again, thank you so much!"

~ Katherine Ten Eyck

"My daughter has enjoyed being a counselor and Discovery Room docent this summer. It is great to see her excited about her "job" and she loves the young campers. Thanks for all the NDC does for our community."

~ Shelley Starr and Dave Martin

"My daughter really had a great time working with the kids last week. I hope she was a help to you! It is a great opportunity for these kids."

~ Volunteer Parent

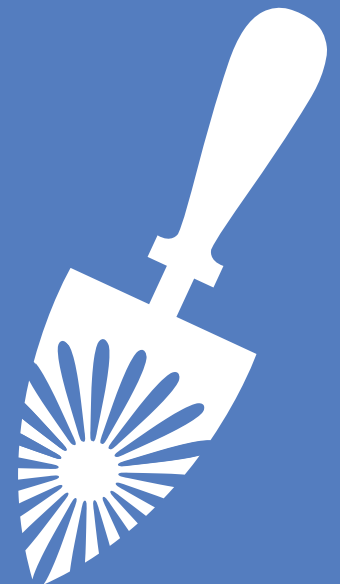


In addition to our teen volunteers, nearly 300 volunteers logged over 1,700 hours of service throughout the year. They helped care for the park, made community and fundraising events successful and fun, and assisted with programs and office work.

A core group of gardeners comes weekly to care for the herb garden and other beds. Some of these Willing Wednesday Workers have been volunteering at the Center for over 20 years!

We are lucky to partner with two *National Charity League* Chapters: *Heart of Texas* and *Bayou Villages*, on a regular basis. NCL volunteers helped with newsletter mailings, ran activities at community events, and served as Home Tour docents.

Sixteen Eagle candidates and one Gold Award candidate developed and implemented projects in the park. Nearly 550 Scouts helped with these projects.





Special Events

Families from throughout the greater Houston area come to celebrate the seasons with us in Russ Pitman Park.

At **Spring Fling** we offer crafts using recycled materials, guided nature walks in the park, and live music.

Art in the Park is an annual art exhibition in the park each April. Ten to fifteen artists are invited to create pieces inspired by and designed for Russ Pitman Park. A talk and tour of the pieces is offered with artists and naturalists interpreting the works for the general public.

Summer Fun Day, sponsored by ACME Party and Tent Rental, provides games, face painting, hotdogs, sno-cones, and drinks to all who come by.

Pumpkin Patch draws the largest crowds – nearly 3,500 this year - for two days of pumpkins, carnival games, pizza, face painting, a moonwalk, inflatable obstacle course, rock wall climbing, a rope bridge and more.

Two fundraising events bring both local and city-wide support for our educational programs: the Annual **Bellaire Home Tour** in the spring; and our **Twilight Gala** in the fall. The Home Tour is our longest-running event celebrating its 28th year in 2010. Our 15th Twilight Gala celebrated the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Friends of Bellaire Parks which became the Nature Discovery Center.

These fundraising events helped us raise over \$100,000 in the 2010 fiscal year in support of our educational programs for children, teachers, scouts, adults, and families.



Income

Direct Public Support	\$ 172,072
Foundations	\$ 70,625
Corporations	28,360
Individuals	22,887
Government	50,000
Other	200
Memberships & Program fees	70,110
Fundraising events	110,374
Other	1,866
Total	\$354,422
October 1 funds on hand	46,479
Loans from Permanent Fund	70,000
TOTAL	\$470,901

Expenses

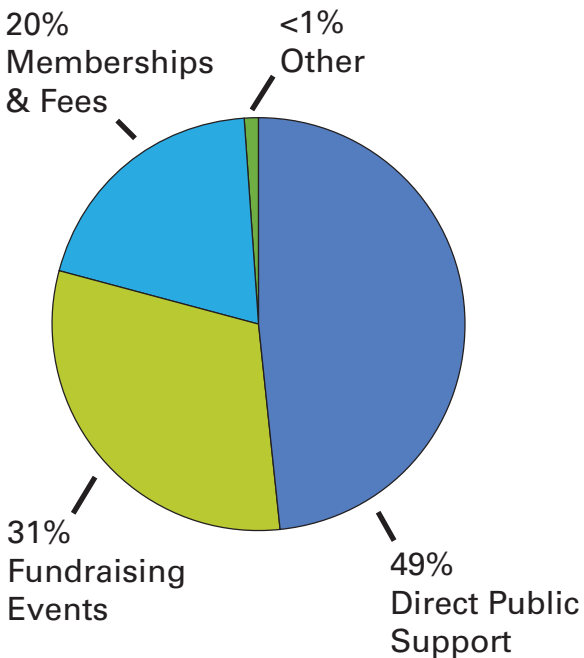
Program Services	\$350,653	(78%)
Administration	44,890	(10%)
Fundraising	53,392	(12%)
TOTAL	\$ 448,935	

Funds on hand at year end \$ 21,966

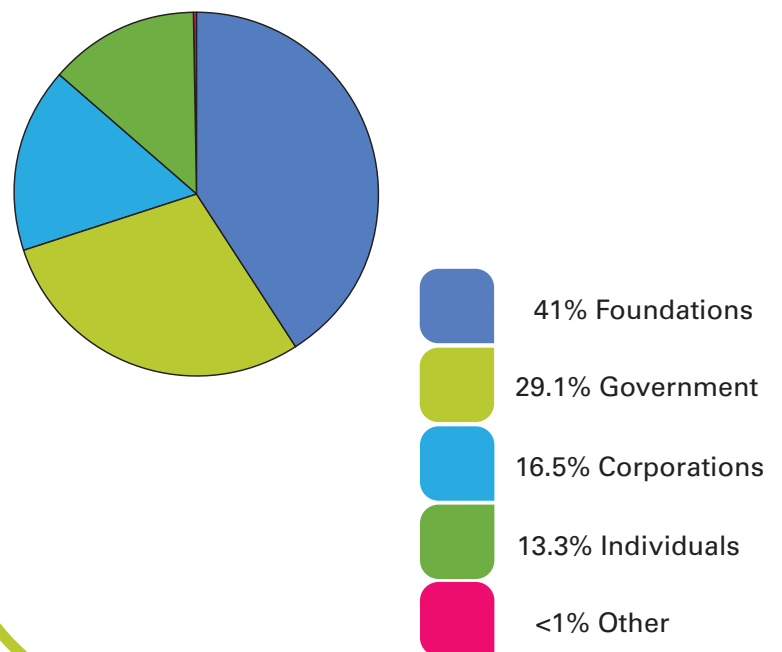
Budget

Fiscal Year Ending
September 30, 2010

Income



Sources of Direct Public Support



Donors

Discovery Circle (\$15,000+)

Harris County Commissioner,
Precinct 3 Steve Radack
Houston Endowment Inc.

Investigator Circle (\$10,000+)

ACME Party and Tent Rental
The Brown Foundation, Inc.
Chevron
Exxon Mobil Corporation
The Albert & Ethel Herzstein
Charitable Foundation

Explorer Circle (\$5,000+)

Kinder Morgan Foundation



Wildlife Benefactor (\$1,000+)

AT&T
Bellaire Young Mothers
Better Homes & Gardens
Real Estate-Anderson Properties
The Buzz Magazines
CenterPoint Energy
City Wide Tree Services*
Lynda Clemmons and Susan Wood
Christiane Copeland
Epic Custom Homes
Steve and Halley Erickson
Eurocar-Werk
Exxon Mobil Foundation
Ray C. Fish Foundation
Thomas and Marybeth Flaherty
John and Bridgette Goss
Charles R. and Tracy Hallenberger
Michael and Susan Hawes
Gloria Herman
Herman Family Fund
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Jacob & Terese Hershey Foundation
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Les and Mary Puckett Children's
Foundation
RAM Industries, Inc.
The Samuels Foundation
Scurlock Foundation
Robert and Cynthia Siegel
Robert and Margaret Simmons
Studio Red Architects, LP
The Williams Companies, Inc.

Wildlife Guardian (\$500+)

Robert and Jamie Allen
Alternative Power Solutions
Bellaire Broiler Burger
Briggs & Veselka Co.
Rodney and Judy Creel
Thomas and Marybeth Flaherty
Will Fleming*
Frost Bank - Bellaire

Larry Haas Insurance Agency
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Houston Sign Company*
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Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell LLP
Marquise Pools, LLC
Minuteman Press of Bellaire*
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Southwest Building Products, Inc.
Studio Red Architects, LP
Sword Plumbing Company*
Venetian Blind Carpet One Floor & Home
Don Verser
Village Plumbing and Home Services
Isabel Brown Wilson
Xella AAC Texas Inc.

Wildlife Supporter (\$250+)

Agris Cosmetic Surgery Association
David and Beth Black
John and Michele Black
Ed Biegert and Cathleen Trechter
Boy Scouts of America, Troop 266*
BP Fabric of America Fund
Marcy and Gerald Brown
Capitol Printing*
Ben and Kelly Cervenka
Gregory and Yvette Clark
Keith and Mary Cohn
COM for CARE, Inc.
Community National Bank
Ben and Jennifer Cowan
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Ira and Patricia Gruber
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Patio 1 Furniture
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Christopher and Kimberly Reichert
Rice Tutors, Inc.
Robert and Margaret Simmons
John Stevenson and Robyn Rothman

* in-kind donations

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