

# GRATITUDE REPORT

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





# A LETTER FROM OUR CO-FOUNDER & BOARD CHAIR

To Our Nature Sacred Community,

With deep gratitude, you'll find in this Annual Report many of Nature Sacred's accomplishments throughout 2024—a magnificent year underscored by service and hard work with communities across the country by our steadfast Board members, devoted staff, inspiring Firesouls, trusted partners, and generous donors. On behalf of our entire Nature Sacred community, thank you for all you continue to do to honor, preserve, and provide access to nature for all.

Last year marked the first full year of operations since we lost our beloved Co-Founder, Tom Stoner. Through nature, we know that life only moves on in patterns of progress that are grounded in the strength and reflective spirit of what—and who—has come before.

Inspired by the broad community of Nature Sacred champions, we are delighted to announce that Tom deepened his commitment to the mission of Nature Sacred by making a \$10M bequest to the Endowment Account, ensuring long-term sustainability.

This transformational gift is the result of Tom's belief in the accelerated progress he witnessed at Nature Sacred these past five years. Tom's intention was to foster a dynamic path forward by lifting up all that the Nature Sacred community has accomplished together. Tom's gift is providing the inspiration to dream what is possible to bring access to nature for all. It will take the energy of this national movement to make that dream reality.

Nature Sacred's future begins now. And we need you more than ever.

As we embark this year on our next five year strategic plan, we are excited to share with you how we can gather, champion, promote and activate the interweaving of people and nature coming together to improve well-being. We are beyond grateful for our shared belief in the value of this impact. Once again, on behalf of all those we serve at Nature Sacred, thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

With joy, gratitude, and an eye toward a greener future,

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Kitty Stoner

Co-Founder & Vice Chair

Pascal Mittermaier

Pascal Millermaier

Board Chair

#### **CEO LETTER**

Itello, friend.

2024 was an extraordinary year! It was a year reflective of our steady progress to achieve the ambitious goals we laid out in our first five-year plan. It was a year that we deeply listened—to our Firesouls in more than **20** gatherings and events and to communities in the **80** design sessions we hosted where Sacred Places are in development. As I write this, we are rounding the corner of our final year of that ambitious strategic plan and I have every assurance that we will achieve everything we set out to do. As an organization, we have planned the work and worked the plan. But it is you, our dedicated supporters, who have championed our mission into fruition and who have sparked joy throughout the process.

Joy was front and center in September when a long-awaited Sacred Place, the Garden of Hope and Healing, opened at the April Samson Cancer Center in Lincoln, Nebraska—one of the **10** new Sacred Places that opened in 2024. Joy was contagious when our Programs team gathered with Firesouls across the nation for a Listening Tour to inform our next strategic plan. And that joy was amplified when our mission was buoyed by a legacy gift to our Endowment from our Co-Founder and my dad, Tom Stoner.

As I think about where we are and where we are headed, it is clear that we have, all along, been forging the path for the next generation—those who will inherit what we have all worked to create.

So, I invite you to turn these pages to both reflect and be inspired. Thanks to your generosity, we are creating meaningful, tangible change—it can be seen in the number of Sacred Places sprouting across the nation, it can be felt through the connection of our network of Firesouls that are the heartbeat of all we do in our Sacred Places, and it can be witnessed by the transformational moments had in Sacred Places through heartfelt journal entries. It will be experienced for generations to come as the legacy we create, together.

With gratitude and abundant joy,

Alden E. Stoner CEO, Nature Sacred

Alden E Stoner



P.S.

I invite you to create a pause to visit (at least!) one of our Sacred Places this year and experience firsthand, all you have made possible. Find our most updated list of Sacred Places by scanning the QR code.



## MISSION

To provide the opportunity for a deeper human experience by inspiring and supporting the creation of public green spaces that offer a temporary place of sanctuary, encourage reflection, provide solace, and engender peace and well-being.

## VISION

We envision a time when every urban community in the U.S. will provide people with opportunities for intimate, intentional daily doses of nearby urban nature through the creation of a system of nature spaces.



### A NATURE SACRED GLOSSARY



#### **SACRED PLACE**

Sacred Places are green spaces designed using a process and model honed over 25 years; spaces created with a specific purpose: to provide mindful reflection and solace to intentionally improve health & wellbeing.



#### THE FIRESOUL

Firesouls are volunteer community leaders—catalysts for change who recognize the need and vital role a green space can offer within their community. They serve as community liaisons, ensuring that each Sacred Place is designed with the community's needs at the forefront.



#### THE FIRESOUL NETWORK

The national Firesoul Network exists to cultivate collaboration and alliance between Firesouls across cities and states and unleash and foster/bolster community leaders. Through education sessions, inspirational speakers, career development tools, and virtual and in-person gatherings, Firesouls are able to share, learn and grow from each other. This not only strengthens the stewardship of their Sacred Places, but also the integral ways they serve their communities.



#### **BENCH & JOURNAL**

In each Sacred Place, you will find a Nature Sacred bench, inviting visitors to take a moment of respite and enjoy the nature around them. Tucked under each bench is a little yellow journal, a place for visitors to connect and reflect.

### THE LASTING LEGACY OF A SACRED PLACE

At Nature Sacred, we take the long view. The work we do today—creating Sacred Places, fostering connections, and strengthening communities—is an investment in the future. A future where people and nature are deeply intertwined, where green spaces are more than parks, and where healing, renewal, and belonging last for generations.

By investing in these relationships and supporting community-led design, we ensure that Sacred Places are more than temporary spaces—they are legacies. Spaces of refuge today. Foundations for tomorrow. A reminder that what we plant with care now will provide shade, solace, and strength long into the future.

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Partnering with Nature Sacred is an investment with recurring dividends of impact. The ability to leverage and amplify this proven model not only creates a visible, tangible impact, it fosters connection and wellbeing far beyond what can be measured. And, because of the financial health of Nature Sacred, there is a lot of satisfaction in knowing my charitable gift is leveraged directly toward the mission.

Scott Brickman Managing Director, Long Grove Capital

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As trustees of the TKB Foundation, we embrace our opportunity to be the next generation of stewards for causes important to Steve and Anne Dodge. We are honored and delighted to be supporters and champions of the work of Nature Sacred. Through their engagement and investment in communities across the US, and through their own cross generational leadership, Nature Sacred believes in the effectiveness of long term commitment to create meaningful impact.

**TKB Trustees** 



### WHAT IS NATURE SACRED?

Nature Sacred is growing a national network of urban sanctuaries created to reduce stress, improve health, and strengthen communities.



## SERVICE PROVIDER AND PARTNER

We help communities bring their green space visions to life through a proven process grounded in deep listening and collaboration.

For more, please see pages 8-11



#### NETWORK BUILDER

Supporting community leaders—the Firesouls—with stewardship resources and cultivating meaningful connections to ensure the long-term sustainability of their Sacred Places.

For more, please see pages 12-16



#### RESEARCH AGGREGATOR

We offer accessible, evidence-driven insights and data on the benefits of nature, helping communities gain the support they need to protect and enhance their landscapes.

For more, please see page 17







#### **Providing Nearby, Contemplative Nature Access**

in

16 STATES in

60+
MUNICIPALITIES

serving

60+ MILLION
COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

## NATURE SACRED, **SERVICE PROVIDER & PARTNER**



We support the design and creation of Sacred Places that can be found everywhere—from once-neglected urban lots to hospitals to school campuses. We help guide communities and organizations through the process of bringing their nature spaces to life.

Since 2020, we have 90 new Sacred Places in our pipeline toward our goal of 100 by 2025.









OMPLETED DESIGN



**UNDER CONSTRUCTION** 



SACRED PLACES OPENED

**134** Sacred Places opened since 1996

# NATURE FOR WELLNESS SPOTLIGHT: GARDEN OF HOPE AND HEALING



**SACRED PLACE:** Garden of Hope and Healing

**LOCATION:** Lincoln, NE

Bryan Health's April Sampson Cancer Center offers advanced technology and treatment within a healing, comfortable environment for the Midwest region. The true beauty of the new cancer center lies not only in its natural surroundings and comforting aesthetic, but in bringing nearly every element of cancer care and treatment together under one roof.

Nature Sacred worked with the Bryan Health community, neighboring residents, local non-profits, and other stakeholders to provide a design centered on the unique needs of this community. This healing garden provides staff, patients, family members, and visitors to this visionary campus a natural sanctuary and place of respite. Visible from the building windows and a short walk away from it, the site is in a prime spot to become integrated into the routines of staff, patients, and family.











June and Paul Schorr, philanthropic catalysts for the Garden of Hope and Healing, with Alden and Kitty Stoner at the Sacred Place opening on September 20, 2024

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Of the hundreds of projects I've done, this is by far my favorite. With others they will degrade over time. With this one, it'll only get better.



**Don Sheets**Facilities Design Planner,
Bryan Medical Center

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I knew people would use the space, but had no idea how much it would be used in the short window of time that it has been open. It's just so beautiful—it's just amazing how it draws people in. Patients are constantly talking about it. Staff are so amazed they have a space to sit and be quiet and drink their coffee while watching the sunrise. You all told us how awesome this space would be and now I see it—100%, it is everything we needed.



**Firesoul Valerie Hunt**Director of Philanthropy
and Major Gifts Officer



Garden of Hope and Healing labyrinth



Scan this QR code to learn more about the Garden of Hope and Healing.

# COMMUNITY HEALING SPOTLIGHT: MUSLIM FAMILY CENTER



**SACRED PLACE:** Sakinah Gardens

**LOCATION:** Columbia, MD

The Muslim Family Center has been serving Muslims living and working in Howard County, MD for over a decade. They strive to nurture spiritual excellence within families by offering purposeful programs and services in an uplifting and inclusive environment.

The Center's location is accessible through the center and an adjacent city park, but in need of much support to reach their visioned community space. The community includes many active volunteers and families who travel from other counties to spend time here. There is currently no space to meet or hold events, requiring the Center to rent spaces or meet in nearby parks so they partnered with Nature Sacred to create a Sacred Place. Currently in the active design process, this space will welcome anyone and everyone who would like to spend time in it—whether they are part of the community, or simply passing by, just like any other community center—particularly young adults and children.

The soon-to-be Sacred Place is nestled behind MFC's building, offering ample open space as well as a more wooded area towards the back of the site. A Sacred Place here will enable folks to come together more often and feel like they have roots within the larger community.







Site plan draft of the future Sakinah Gardens Sacred Place by Design Advisors at Floura Teeter



We bring together community leaders to spearhead the unique design, programming and events of each space, tending to them physically and spiritually through the Nature Sacred Firesoul Network, our long-term site stewardship program.

**IN 2024** 



Firesouls total in our network

56 23

New Leadership, Development. Firesouls Program offerings

**77** Enhancement & Enrichment Grants awarded

Enrichment Grants aid Firesouls in providing activities for their communities while Enhancement Grants help defray upkeep and special maintenance costs, as well as support the addition of enhancing features in Sacred Places.

#### **Our Programming Guides**



# ENHANCEMENT GRANT RECIPIENT SPOTLIGHT: MARIAN HOUSE COURTYARD



**SACRED PLACE:** Marian House Courtyard

LOCATION: Baltimore, MD



Nature Sacred's partnership with Marian House extends more than a decade. Marian House is a holistic, healing community for women and their children who are in need of housing and support services that hosts two Sacred Places. The initial Sacred Place

has a unique combination of contemplative nature and art, featuring four "monumental women" sculptures. The newly opened Geckle Memorial Garden (pictured on page 8) adjacent to Marian House Independence Place, is an independent living residence for the women and children they serve. The former school building is now 22 units of permanent supportive housing complete with community spaces, a lobby, staff offices, and room to breathe in the Sacred Place.

The Enhancement Grant provided Marian House the opportunity to revitalize the Courtyard Sacred Place by renewing the current fountain feature, and repurposing this design feature of the Sacred Place into a Zen Garden to be enjoyed by residents and staff alike. The thoughtful redesign will allow Marian House to hold more community events and celebratory gatherings with ease. Most of all, it saved one of the most important resources: time.



Group photo of Marian House staff members in front of the new Zen Garden | Neha Srinivasan PLA, Design Advisor

# ENRICHMENT GRANT RECIPIENT SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF NE ALABAMA

SACRED PLACES: Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama (CFNEA)

The Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama (CFNEA) is our local partner to a hub of 18 Sacred Places in Alabama and a beautiful representation of our community foundation partnership model. With rich programming and through ongoing grant support, CFNEA has leveraged the Firesoul Network for maximum good. CFNEA hosts quarterly Firesoul events each year. These events are a time for Firesouls to come together, workshop and ideate on programming for their Sacred Places, and apply for grant funding to support these activities. In 2024, Nature Sacred matched CFNEA's grants given to each Alabama Sacred Place.

The following programs and enhancements were supported by this funding:

Crossroads Garden: A Place of Solace and Remembrance | Center, Alabama

Veterans & Military Celebration, 2024

Stringfellow Garden | Ashland, AL

Junior Firesoul Community Project Completion Event

SAFE's Mind, Body and Spirit Pathway | Sylacauga, AL

A Bee Adventure Program

Talladega College - Honoring Our Ancestors, Enacting our Dreams | Talladega, AL

"Brother What's On Your Mind?" series

Reflection and Meditation Garden at Fort Payne Walking Park | Fort Payne, AL

Update Stone Work and Clean Up Work Party

St. Joseph's on-the-Mountain Episcopal Church | Mentone, AL

Labyrinth Retreat

Mentone Arts Culture Center | Mentone, AL

Seniors Cookout Lucheon at the Garden

Pell City Gateway Community Garden | Pell City, AL

Flower Power in Gardening

#### JUNIOR FIRESOUL PROGRAM

With an eye toward the long-term health of these Sacred Places, CFNEA developed a Junior Firesoul program this year. Sustainability and succession planning are main objectives for our Sacred Places. These young leaders are certainly the next generation of catalysts and caretakers for their community.



### THE FIRESOUL NETWORK LISTENING TOUR

Nature Sacred spent much of 2024 *deeply listening* to our Firesouls—the community catalysts and Sacred Place caretakers—in an effort to shape our ongoing engagement and partnership.

First, we surveyed the 260 Firesouls in our network. Then, we hit the road on a Listening Tour. Through a series of **six regional events**, **dozens of luncheons**, **and countless one-on-one connections**, Nature Sacred team members canvassed the Network across the country gathering feedback and insights for our next Strategic Plan.







### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**



#### Maintenance is a critical concern.

Through in person canvassing and the electronic survey, it is clear that maintenance is a critical concern for Firesouls AND that they would like Nature Sacred to play a larger role in supporting these efforts.



## The intentional networking is valuable and they want more!

In every in person canvassing event, Firesouls requested more opportunities to connect with each other. This included requests for more individual connections, small and large group sessions, in person and virtual networking opportunities. And 75% of Firesouls reported interest in a National Gathering!



## Nature Sacred grant making is working and potentially model making.

Firesouls resoundingly expressed that the low lift, community driven aspects of Nature Sacred grantmaking was critical to allow them to offer programmatic opportunities in Sacred Places without burdening capacity. In every in person event Firesouls said they wished other grant makers could operate this way and in Baltimore they voiced a wish for Nature Sacred to become a changemaker organization by sharing how our grant funding works with others.



"We love being a part of a huge network of people who value time spent in nature and time spent reflecting. We love being a part of the Nature Sacred family."

— Laura Wilson, Pell City Gateway | Alabama

At Nature Sacred, we support, curate, and share research on the power of nature to inspire more investment in Sacred Places. Our work—and its impact—continues to gain national attention, helping to advance the conversation on nature's crtical role in health, well-being, and community resilience.





## FILBERT STREET GARDEN AND NATURE SACRED IN THE BALTIMORE SUN

The Baltimore Sun featured Filbert Street Garden's Sacred Place on its front page, highlighting its transformation into a thriving green space that fosters reflection, renewal, and community connection.





## HIGHLIGHTING NATURE'S ROLE IN HEALTHY AGING IN GENERATIONS MAGAZINE

Generations Magazine featured a first-person account of nature's healing power, highlighting research on how green spaces improve well-being, especially for older adults, and introducing Nature Sacred's work in creating community-led urban sanctuaries.



#### ALDEN STONER ON HEALTH GIG

The power of nature to heal and transform. Alden Stoner joined Tricia Reilly Koch and Doro Bush Koch on the *Health Gig* podcast to discuss the impact of Sacred Places on individual and community well-being.

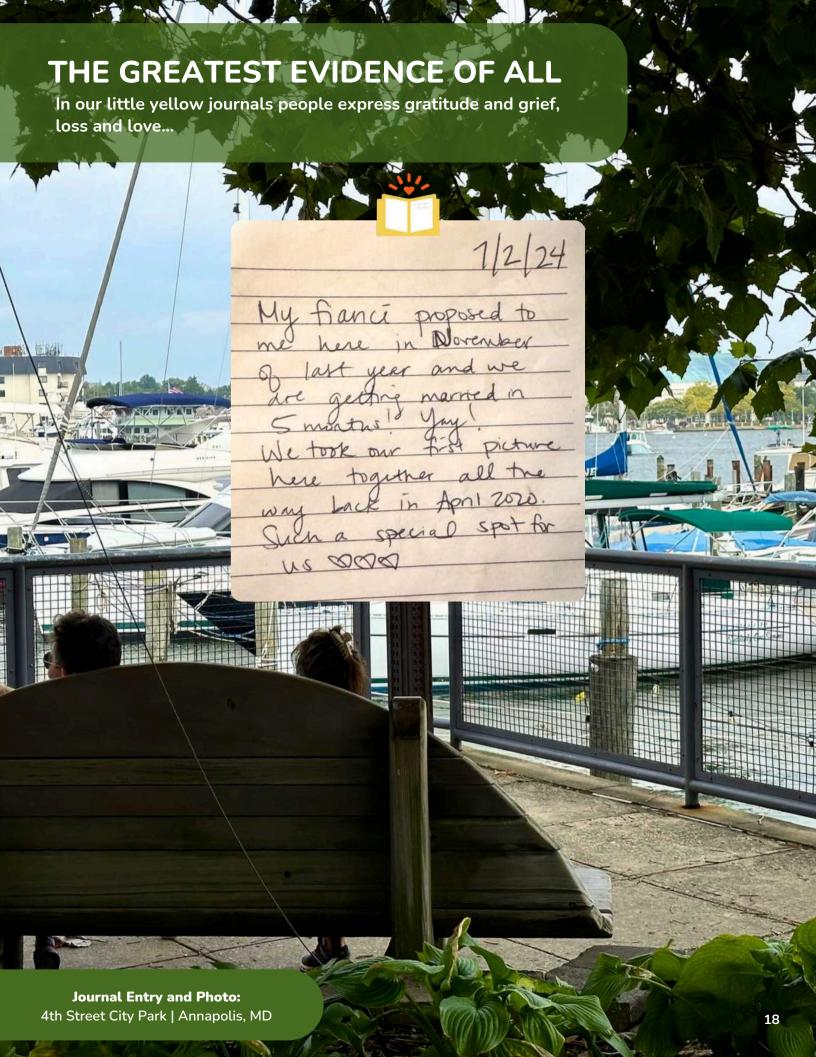




#### NEHA SRINIVASAN ON MUD KITCHEN

Designing spaces that change lives. Former Senior Manager of Design and Sacred Places, Neha Srinivasan, was a guest on Mud Kitchen, where she shared how our spaces are shaped by and for communities.





## **2024 FINANCIALS**



All figures are based on unaudited financials.

## Statement of Financial Position December 31, 2024

#### **ASSETS**

Cash	\$227,904
Investments	\$23,879,739
Other Assets	\$42,048
Total Assets	\$24,149,691

#### **LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS**

Current Liabilities	\$108,393

#### **Net Assets**

Donor Restricted	\$1,261,579
Board Restricted (Endowment)	\$15,521,745
Unrestricted	\$7,257,974

Total Liabilities & Net Assets \$24,149,691

## **2024 FINANCIALS**

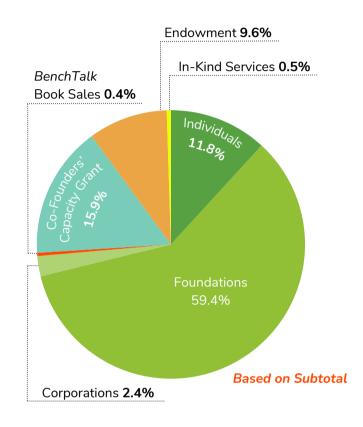
All figures are based on unaudited financials.

## Statement of Activities January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024

#### **SUPPORT & REVENUE**

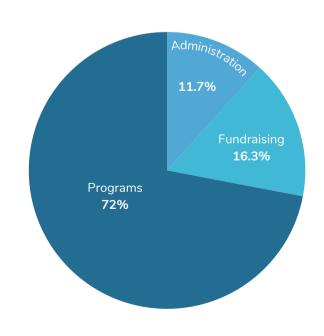
Individuals	\$333,658
Foundations	\$1,676,178
Corporations	\$69,000
Book Sales	\$10,987
Co-Founders' Capacity Grant	\$450,000
Endowment [5% distribution]	\$269,833
In-Kind Services	\$14,100
Subtotal Support & Revenue	\$2,823,756
Co-Founder Bequests*	\$14,107,389
2024 Total Support & Revenue	\$16,931,145

<sup>\*</sup>See note from Kitty and Pascal on page 2



#### **EXPENSES**

Total Expenses	\$2,464,677
Programs & Outreach	\$1,774,568
Fundraising	\$401,752
Administration	\$288,357



# PLANTING, GROWING, AND THRIVING THANKS TO OUR 2024 GENEROUS DONORS

with the Agape Fund **Anonymous Donors** Laurie Salladin & Mark Baganz Will Baker and Whitney Taylor John and Laura Banes Nichole Battle Patricia Baum Family Foundation Heriselda Begaj-Viotti Kathleen M. Bell Jill Benscoter Berkinshaw Charitable Fund The Blackburn Foundation Inc. David and Mikel Blair Family Foundation The Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation Rebecca and Mike Bogan Ann Bozick **Bradford Family Foundation** Brenton/Galbraith Family Fund Anna Brickman Scott Brickman Brinton Family Fund The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund Brenda and David Brown Brown Advisory Linda Bunce **Bunting Family Foundation** The Mary K. Bush Charitable Trust Buysse Per-Lee Family Fund John F. Chavez Francis P. Chiaramonte, MD Family Foundation Clavton Baker Trust Dr. Beverly Dale, PhD Joyce and William Donlon James Duncan Jr. Janet Dunn in honor of Edward Dunn Suzy and Eddie Dunn Fund Katie and Jib Edwards Eisner Family Fund Joni and Dick Ellsworth

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Renee Vanderstelt
Eva Vega-Olds
Angela and Evan Walseng
Karen and Chuck Walsh
Bob Whitcomb
The Whiting-Turner Contracting Company

Harry Wilson

Robbie and Marvin Winick

#### **To our 2024 Anonymous Donors:**

Please know that while your names are not on this listing, the impact of your kindness will be felt throughout Nature Sacred and by those we serve.

Thank you for being quiet champions of our mission.

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Lauren Marshall
Emily Moore
Glen Stewart

Tom Stoner, Co-Founder, In Memoriam
Jack Bloodgood, Founding Director, In Memoriam
Chuck Foster, Founding Director
Chelle Stoner, Founding Director



Opening Event | Nurse, Firesoul, and Nature Sacred team member Garden of Gratitude at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center | Baltimore, MD

Photos within this report have been thoughtfully curated and generously contributed by Harry Connolly, Nature Sacred Staff, and various talented individuals.

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