

Demarest Nature News



Demarest Nature Center Association
Box 41, Demarest, N.J., 07627

www.demarestnaturecenter.org
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We hope you have been enjoying the Demarest Nature Center, whether walking through the woods, volunteering to maintain the trails, or watching the wildlife. We continue to see deer, frogs, ducks, eagles, foxes, woodpeckers, and other creatures. It was amazing to see nature come alive this spring. Entry is always free, and the trails are well marked.

There have been a lot of great events so far this year. In February, we had our annual maple syrup-making demonstration, and roasted s'mores.

We continue to offer guided walks the first Saturday of each month at 10 AM, except for July and August. We also had a guided birdwatching tour with the Bergen Audubon Society. During Canoe Day, we appreciated the help of the Scouts from Troop 20, which is chartered by the Demarest Nature Center. Veolia lent us their canoes again for that event, and we appreciated their support. We again partnered with Marc Gussen (naturalist at Closter Nature Center) to do field trips and nature talks for 12 groups of elementary school students.

Have a look at the beautiful custom birdhouse at the entrance to the DNC, built by Demarest resident Anthony Coscarello. For the first time, we are offering day camps through a partnership with SOAR Education (see info in this Newsletter). Also, mark your calendar for the Oktoberfest & Craft Show on Oct. 11 from 10:00AM to 5:00PM at the Duck Pond.

We are all volunteers. We use funds to maintain the trails and support wholesome programs for the entire community. Please help us continue to provide a refuge for nature and people. We hope to see you soon in the nature center!

– *Stephen Tillack*, President, Demarest Nature Center

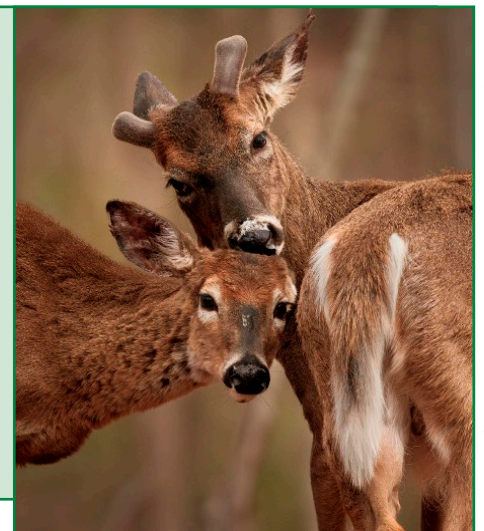


PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

This tender image of a buck and a doe in the nature center, taken by Diego Garces, won the grand prize in this year's John C. Goodwin Nature Photo Contest. In the adult competition, Joel Rudin won first place (for a photo of a bald eagle), Jacob Casbar won second place (blue heron), Garces won third place (red-tailed hawk), and Joey Pedras won honorable mention (deer). In the youth competition, Alex Shaari won first place (downy woodpecker), Nicholas Shaari won second place (winter wren), Ethan Kim won third place (trees reflected in water), and Nicholas Shaari won honorable mention (pileated woodpecker).

To see all of the winners, go to

<https://www.demarestnaturecenter.org/photo-contest/>



Your membership dollars allow us to continue to give back to the community and preserve and protect DNC's 55 acres of meadows, forests and wetlands.

DEMAREST NATURE CENTER SPOTLIGHT

DAVE EMERSON IS TURNING 90

Dave Emerson, a founding trustee of the nature center, recently spoke with Peter Coy, a fellow trustee. This is an edited transcript.

I was born in 1935, August 15th. We were living in Staten Island because my dad could take the ferry from there over to Wall Street. He was a banker. We moved when I was 5 years old back to where my father was born, which is Demarest, on Stewart Street. We had one school, the square stone building that's part of the middle school now. My father and grandfather were presidents of the Board of Education. My father, Luther Lee Emerson, built the school that is attached to that square stone building. He also built the grade school that is on Lenox and the school on County Road. After the second world war, there was an influx of residents, so we needed new schools.

I went to Tenafly High School and then the University of Vermont for agriculture. I joined the Air Force ROTC. They said, "We'll make you a pilot." I was shipped off to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and then Malden airfield in Missouri. In the mornings we had school and in the afternoons we flew. I flew T28 and T-34 trainers. The T-34 was a hot plane. It could go straight up at 500 mph.

They called me down to the office and said, "Now we'll give you your flight papers, and we're ready to ship you off." I said, "Wait! I only signed up for two years. I think I want to go do something else." Oh, they were very really upset because they had spent all this money on me, but that was their fault.

I got married in San Antonio, and we moved back to Demarest. My daughter was born in 1960, and my two sons were born in '72 and '73. The first job I had was at the J.J. Newberry five-and-dime store in the Bergen Mall. Then I became a credit manager with W.T. Grant Company. Then I went to Wall Street with Thomson McKinnon. We would put together syndicates to sell shares issued by companies like AT&T. I also did partnerships in cattle herds. I'd get on a plane, go out and make sure they had as many cattle as they said they did.

After 12 years there I retired. I bought a Kampgrounds of America campground on Otsego Lake in Richfield Springs, N.Y. I ran that for 15 years. We had singers on Saturday, movies, bingo parties, ice cream socials.

"I retired five or six times, but I can't stand sitting at home."

I think it was '93, Dad and Mom weren't doing well, so I went back to Demarest and took care of them. My Mom died in 2003 at age 93, and my Dad died in 2005 at age 98. My wife, that's a sad story. She was descended from a Spanish princess. She was one of 14 children. She suffered from mental illness. She became a ward of the state in New York and then Florida. She died two years ago.

I worked for Benjamin Brothers for about 15 years. I still go back to Benjamin every day almost. Now I'm a handyman for people just to keep busy. I retired five or six times, but I can't stand sitting at home.

I've been working since I was 9 or 10 years old. We had chickens for eggs. I'd go deliver eggs, and then I'd go to school. One day I was riding down Hardenburgh Avenue fast and I hit the railroad tracks, and there went four dozen eggs, all over the tracks.

Most of the roads in Demarest at that time were dirt roads. We had passenger train service to Hoboken, then we'd take the ferry across to



Dave Emerson rests a foot on a picnic table that he built and donated to the nature center last year

Manhattan. It was a different time. During World War II we had troops from Camp Shanks in Orangetown practicing in the woods where the nature center is now. There are still foxholes. There's one by the bench that's named after me [near the Nine Bridges Trail].

We used to skinny-dip in a pond on Senator Wakelee's property, east of Brookside and south of Lenox. There was a cinder block factory on Brookside near Hardenburgh. All summer long you'd hear "poom, poom" as the mechanical hammer would pound the cinder blocks together.

Back then the Tenakill Creek meandered. There were lots of vernal pools. There was a pond on the west side of the Tenakill. It was big enough that you could dive into it, snapping turtles and all.

"We would dig out the clay and make bowls and throw them in the campfire and then go down and milk the roe out of the carp."

We had carp that were two or three feet long. We would catch them and run our hands under them to milk them for roe [fish eggs]. If you look at the banks of the Tenakill you see these layers of white material. That's clay. We would dig out the clay and make bowls and throw them in the campfire and then go down and milk the roe out of the carp. Then we would take that back and put it in the bowls we had made, and fry up our roe. With a slice of bread, that would be our lunch.

There were polio epidemics in the late 1940s and early 1950s. My sister had polio. She was in an iron lung for a year. People thought mosquitoes were spreading polio. So the Army Corps of Engineers straightened out the Tenakill to dry up the places the mosquitoes hatched. It turned out that's not how polio is spread, by the way. Straightening it lowered the water table by about four feet. That's why you have so many trees tipping over in the nature center. Because they had plenty of water, the roots go straight out instead of down.

In the early 1970s, there was a group that wanted to put a tennis club where the nature center is now and another group that wanted to put in a golf club. My father and Philip Duffy, who lived in the Donnybrook development, led the effort to preserve the land. We had our first meeting in 1971. We incorporated in 1972. We got a lease from the mayor and council in 1973. Originally we had 85 acres, but part of it became the ballfields, the swim club and the leaf mulch piles, so we went down to 55. I was the first president, and my dad was the first secretary and treasurer. Other people from the early days were Angela Rodin, John Logsdon and John Goodwin.

There were two garbage dumps in there. One, which is the Emerson Meadow now, was filled with cars and car parts and tires. There was also one near the hockey ponds. Don Wiggers volunteered his trucks. He helped us an awful lot.

We started the Oktoberfest. My parents would take the old Buick station wagon out to eastern Long Island and load it up with cabbages and pumpkins and all kinds of potatoes, and we had a stand in the Oktoberfest. Once the nature center had a square dance at a restaurant. For a while we had yoga in the East Meadow.

We had walks, but they were not formal ones like now. We have the best nature center right now. Best board, best people, most knowledgeable. It's unbelievable. We held on. And so we're 50 years old, plus.

DEMAREST NATURE CENTER RECAP

COMMUNITY TRAIL WALKS

On the first Saturday of each month (except for July and August), the Demarest Nature Center continues to host our Community Trail Walks. Well-attended by nature enthusiasts of all ages, each hike is led by a DNC board member or invited guest. In January, board member Jeff Shaari discussed the brumation and hibernation of several inhabitants of our woods. In February, our walk was combined with our 3rd annual Maple Syrup Day (see below). Jeff then led March's walk and discussed some of the flora and fauna found in the DNC. April's walk was led by board member Ray Slaman, who talked about some of the old and interesting trees of the forest. This was followed by a birdhouse building workshop. In May, Jeff discussed survival strategies of trees while also seeking out some of the lesser-seen creatures of the nature center.

MAPLE SYRUP DAY

On Feb. 8, we held our third annual Maple Syrup Day. Ray Slaman demonstrated the process of tapping and boiling sap to a sweet finished product. We also had a trivia station, taste testing, nature education and scavenger hunts. Coffee and hot chocolate was on hand, and the day was a huge success.



Dave Emerson and Ray Slaman carved out this fallen log near the Imagination Playground. Ray then enlisted the Demarest Public Library children's librarian to organize kids to plant flowers and maintain this beautiful addition to the nature center.



Ray Slaman boiling sap for maple sugar.



From left, Nadav, Maya and Eilon Rosen at the end of the skating party on Jan. 25. A polar vortex ensured that the ice was thick enough. About 25 people came.

OUR NEW BIRDHOUSE

Demarest resident Anthony Coscarello makes elaborate birdhouses as a retirement hobby. He gave the nature center one in the shape of an old barn that's made for black-capped chickadees, nuthatches and titmice. It's on a pole near the bridge by the bulletin board. Check it out on your next visit, and look for the scale model of a 1941 Plymouth truck that's parked next to the miniature barn.

Coscarello, 79, a Vietnam veteran and former Essex County social worker, has lived on Sunset Road in Demarest for 29 years. He shares the home with his wife and two sons. He estimates he has made about 50 birdhouses. "I never sell them," he said. "I go through the nature center a lot. My kids love it. I thought, what better place to put a birdhouse than in the nature center?"



Dave Emerson and Ray Slaman installed this birdhouse in May.



PROTECTING THE FOREST AND COEXISTING WITH DEER

by Julie O'Connor, Ph.D.

Education Director, Animal Protection League of New Jersey

Native insects play an important part in a healthy ecosystem, so don't wipe them out by overdosing your lawn and garden with pesticides. According to the nonprofit group Beyond Pesticides, "A properly planned and planted garden will naturally resist disease, deter insect pests, and be healthy and hardy." Additionally, when planning your garden, visit the Rutgers website Landscape Plants Rated by Deer Resistance.

If you want to learn more about co-existence with deer and explore non-lethal conflict management, visit my organization, the Animal Protection League of New Jersey. The Washington Post reports that non-lethal deer management methods are becoming more widespread. Many places, including one as close as Staten Island, have seen material reductions in their deer populations when they implement sterilization programs.

We are fortunate to live in a time when there is both knowledge and various strategies to help us protect our interconnected ecosystem, from plants to insects to animals.



DEMAREST NATURE CENTER ASSN.

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SCHOLARSHIPS

The nature center awarded environmental studies scholarships to the following students graduating from Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest: **Seunghyun Park, Ethan Dai, Dorian Mor and Julia Rose Weiss.** Congratulations to them and the entire class of 2025!

NEW SUMMER CAMP

Birds of a feather ... go to SOAR Nature Camp in the Demarest Nature Center! There will be two sessions. Nature Art for grades 1-3 (Aug. 4-8) and Feathered Friends for grades 4-7 (Aug. 11-15). Join us for adventure, discovery, nature, and wonderful wildlife! Meet some of SOAR's ambassador animals and learn about the biodiversity right here in Bergen County. Campers learn something new every day and take home cool, daily projects.

The camp week is Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. All equipment is provided by SOAR Education. The fee is just \$275 for the week. Register now and guarantee your little ones an amazing, immersive experience. Go to www.soar.science/book-online.

Questions? Call 201-701-0969. See you soon - we can't wait!! (This camp isn't related to the one sponsored by the Demarest Recreation Commission. For that one, visit <https://demarestnj.gov/boards/recreation>.)

COMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars for our annual **Oktoberfest at the Duck Pond, Oct. 25, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**, featuring handmade crafts, nature exhibits, food and canoe rides. And don't forget the community trail walks the first Saturday of each month (except July and August), leaving from the Imagination Playground at 10 a.m.

Demarest Summer Recreation Camp Program

Demarest SOAR

August 4 - 8, 2025 Grades 1-3

Theme: Nature Art

August 11 - 15, 2025 Grades 4-7

Theme: Feathered Friends

info@soar.science

201-701-0969

www.soar.science

Saturday November 9, 2025

Birdwatching & Nature Walk with Don Torino

--- CHECK US OUT ON SOCIAL MEDIA! ---



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Edited by Stacey Braff & Peter Coy

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The Demarest Nature Center is proud to be the charter organization for Boy Scout Troop 20.

For more information, please contact them at dnc.troop.20.demarest@gmail.com.

We are a 501(c)3! There is no greater feeling than supporting a worthy organization. The Demarest Nature is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. This means that your donations are tax deductible. Your donations support all of our educational programs, scholarships, events and the continued preservation of our green space. Consider a gift to the Demarest Nature Center as an investment in the future of our community. Of course, it goes without saying, or with saying in this case, that we are not offering tax advice by the above statement. Contact any of our trustees if you would like more info.