

## **Brief Description of Nominee**

Start In Your Yard is a visionary initiative launched by the Greater Kane County chapter of Wild Ones, and it is making a difference thanks to volunteer Fox Valley residents. Greater Kane County Wild Ones, founded in 2009, was renamed from Northern Kane to Greater Kane in 2021. It is a chapter of the national Wild Ones organization, founded by Lorrie Otto in 1990 in Milwaukee. As a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization, its mission is to promote native plants, natural landscapes, and environmentally sound landscaping practices in order to preserve biodiversity. Through educating and advocating for native-plant communities, Wild Ones is in the forefront of the natural landscaping movement, helping to change the nature of our impact on the land.

“Start in Your Yard” was inspired by the research of Dr. Doug Tallamy and his book “Nature’s Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard.” After COVID-19 canceled their highly anticipated presentation by Dr. Tallamy in Elgin, the planning committee moved from concept to action. Greater Kane County Wild Ones responded locally, planning and seeding an educational series on Zoom and Facebook in collaboration with the Gail Borden Public Library which is how this nominator is familiar with the three Elgin residents who worked tirelessly, both virtually and physically, to create the free, meaningful content that broke down barriers to environmental literacy. (1492)

## **Volunteer community service**

Among many extraordinary members, three Elgin volunteers must be recognized by this nominator for their exceptional vision and effort in the Community Read of “Nature’s Best Hope.” Jean Muntz, a lifelong gardener, who with her husband Dave, returned abundant native species to their degraded farmland located adjacent to Burnidge Forest Preserve. By education an RN, Jean turned an interest in plants into an Interiorscaping plant business. Once retired, Jean continued the work on her property and became a Wild Ones member. Jean invited Gail Borden Public Library CEO Carole Medal and library staff involvement “to bring support to

homeowners who, by using natives, wish to steward a yard that is shared with many.” Nancy Lamia, an educator for 20 years and then a computer specialist, originally incorporated native plants in her Elgin home landscape to provide nutritional food for the wild birds she loved. After a decade as a Wild Ones member, Nancy used what she learned in both of her careers to make Start In Your Yard accessible online. Nancy has been critical in the success of this project. Mary Alice Masonick planted native species in her yard, neighborhood and church 20 years ago. Also an RN, she realized her passion for health expanded to include nursing the Earth. Mary Alice served as volunteer steward of Burnidge Forest Preserve for a decade and became a Kane County Certified Naturalist. Her bilingual Spanish led the way for Family Fiestas on monarchs and more at the library. (1447)

## Impact

Greater Kane County Wild Ones make a difference for birds, bees, butterflies, creatures and people to live healthier by this green initiative. “We have engaging programs in the colder months and informative tours of members gardens during the blooming months,” says Jean Muntz. Thousands of people attended Start in Your Yard programs both virtually and in person after a Community Read launched in January 2021, “**Why a Community Read?** The crises we face call for us to pull together – reconnect as a community – to address them. One way to do that is to read together a book that inspires us to common, effective action. **Why Nature’s Best Hope?** This book advocates for a simple solution that is powerful, effective, and won’t go out of style...**Why you?** Because you – and I -- have been willing to live with far less beauty and wellness than our hearts desire. Now you – and I – can learn new ways of thinking and acting that will lead us into more respectful, effective and beautiful ways of living in our one world.”

Environmental literacy is a designated 21<sup>st</sup> century theme (Institute of Museum and Library Services). Greater Kane County Wild Ones’ talented and experienced members and friends produced content for the Start In Your Yard website with funding from Elgin’s Sustainability Commission at <http://startinyouryard.com>. Ideas and educational videos are free. Clicking

“Register your interest” allows people to opt for site visits, in which seasoned native gardeners consult with people in their own yards. (1457)

### **Level of effort**

Expect to see dirt under the nails of Greater Kane County Wild Ones members. They raise funds by holding an annual plant sale in May with more than 100 species of perennial plants, trees, shrubs and ferns. They sponsor presenters such as Dr. Doug Tallamy and others to speak in Elgin. In addition to ongoing educational programs, they are committed to planting gardens in public spaces to acquaint people with native plants and encourage their use in replacing grass with habitat. Keeping up public garden spaces is labor-intensive. Demonstration gardens have been planted at various sites around Elgin including the Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House, Valley Creek Gardens at Tyler Creek and Lyle, Parkway Garden at the corner of South DuBois and Erie, swales in the SWAN neighborhood, and at the main library on the Fox River, and others are in the works. They invite the public to join them as demonstration gardens pique people's interest, demonstrate how native plants can be used in landscaping, and inspire people to Start In Your Yard.

Greater Kane County Wild Ones maintains 2 websites:

<https://greaterkanecounty.wildones.org/> and <https://startinyouryard.com/> plus educational newsletters, social media, programs and community events. To launch the Community Read, they created original content for more than a dozen presentations and provided free copies of “Nature’s Best Hope” to book discussion participants. (1338)

### **Inspire others in the community**

Greater Kane County Wild Ones understands the inter-connectedness of partnerships to inspire others. On Earth Day in April 2022, they participated in the City of Elgin’s Earth Day event at Hawthorne Hill along with the Boy Scouts, Conservation Foundation, Elgin Sustainability Commission, Elgin Area Men’s Shed, Friends of the Fox, and many other partners. They have

presented for the U-46 National Biodiversity Teach-In, the Izaak Walton League, Elgin History Museum, Sierra Club, League of Women Voters, Tyler Creek Watershed, and have partnered with the DuPage Monarch Project, and Fox River Day to celebrate and educate on Elgin's watershed. They collect seeds and partner with native seed harvests in October. The "Restoring Oaks in our Kane County Ecosystem" presentation with the Chicago Region Tree Initiative and Gail Borden Library aimed to inspire people to plant, and stop cutting down, oak trees. Promoting other green organizations with like-minded missions on their social media page, such as frog monitoring with the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and the City of Elgin's financial assistance to plant rain gardens, is ongoing. Inspiring bilingual Spanish family workshops held both in person and on Zoom with kits for pick up at the library's main and Rakow Branch drive-up windows, encouraged families to plant milkweed and learn about the monarch butterfly migration between the US and Mexico. Roundtables support for gardeners attempting native landscaping, they shared tips with many who now understand the purpose and urgency of restoring our earth.

(1456)

### **Lasting legacy**

"Most of all, we want to get you thinking about what is your place, what is my place, in this world we share" says Nancy Lamia on video. Communities from neighboring suburbs to other states are inquiring about Greater Kane County Wild Ones' nascent "Start in Your Yard" successes. "Our Start in Your Yard initiative aims to change the lens through which we view ourselves and our surroundings. When we see ourselves as part of nature rather than something apart; when we see nature's gifts up close; when we learn to collaborate with the natural world, we'll happily share our landscapes with the native plants that support our insects and birds. And in this re-connecting, we'll recover our own health and happiness." No doubt this vision, shared with school-age students, families in English and in Spanish, at the library as free public education and at year-round events, is a Greater Kane County Wild Ones legacy for

people, pollinators, and plants for generations to come. Their Start In Your Yard initiative is taking root and has the potential to spread across the country. (1058)

### **Positively Impacted the lives of others in the community**

During the pandemic, in collaboration with the Gail Borden Public Library, Start in Your Yard's so-called opening season hosted 11 presentations which attracted 1,285 people mostly on Zoom. Two YouTube videos had 862 views within the first month; 8 book discussions saw 118 attending, 6 roundtable discussions engaged 46 people, many of whom were new to native gardening. Videos continue to rack up views by people anywhere in the world, bringing attention to what's going on in Elgin. The Start In Your Yard theme started with "Nature's Best Hope" in 2021, followed by "Over Our Heads" on trees in 2022. Next year "Under Our Feet" will examine soils, fungus, the communication network of roots, and resilient agricultural practices. Post-program attendee surveys show that people have both learned about native plants and enjoyed the experiences. Roundtables provided the support that challenge gardeners, from first-timers to more seasoned ones. PR includes WRMN radio, the library's news channels, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/GreaterKaneWildOnes> with more than 1k followers and nearly as many "Likes" while their website features archived videos, accessible, free and highly informative and value-added features. If birds and bees could talk to us, we'd have further testimony of Start In Your Yard's positive impact on their lives. More native habitat means more food and shelter for our fellow creatures trying to live in an urban/suburban environment. (1472)

### **Fosters a spirit of service, citizenship, and responsibility**

Greater Kane County Wild Ones invites all to participate, learn, explore and be better stewards of the earth. They promote "building habitat in our neighborhoods and public spaces." And they write, "Start in Your Yard is a movement of people who are realizing that we have become disconnected from our natural world and our place in it. Recognizing that we are part of nature, we are learning what we need to know to be cooperative partners and share the land we live on." They invite people to

Restore: Start in our own yards, replace grass with plants native to our region, and build sustainable corridors for the flora and fauna that evolved to thrive here;

Advocate: Encourage our neighbors and our communities to join in the movement to restore and preserve this area for generations to come.

Participate: Attend one of our many local events to visit local projects or learn from experienced native gardeners, scientists and conservation experts

(888)

### **What makes the nominee unique**

Margaret Mead's quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has," could not be more applicable than to the Greater Kane County Wild Ones. The organization develops its membership through thoughtful, informative and compelling programming. It provides a forum where people who are departing from the landscaping model enforced by neighbors and ordinances can support each other. It is a collaborative group in which everyone is both a learner and a teacher. Wild Ones members volunteer and share generously in many aspects of community life, resulting in a network of relationships that has facilitated the development of Start In Your Yard.

Wild Ones has started a quiet evolution, creating living landscapes where turf was the norm. They promote factual ecological research, and share an energetic passion for nature, the earth and their fellow humans. As Doug Tallamy points out, this grass-roots, hands-on response to global issues requires no waiting for someone else to act. Each gardener can become a participant with the natural processes already in place, knowing all relationships in nature are meant to be reciprocal..

As we become more aware of the inter-connectedness of all life, we understand that the differences we make here reverberate in local, regional and national landscapes. Working with such an organization, and these extraordinary volunteers, has been a joy and is making a difference, visible in blooming native prairie flowers, waving grasses and thick sky-reaching boughs. Greater Kane Wild Ones volunteers are planting seeds for a better today and a more verdant life-filled tomorrow. They are truly deserving of the Elgin Image Award. **(1283)**

**Upload photos, and educational materials/kits in Spanish.**