Blackwood Educational Land Institute

ANNUAL REPORT 2014

Front cover: Blackwood's Guineau Fowl with chickens. Inside cover: Blackwood Nature Campers creating site-specific mandalas with Journey-Through artist, Heath Brodie.

The Mission of Blackwood Educational Land Institute is to:

Impart a philosophy of living that inspires human resilience; self-sufficiency and generational and cultural connectivity to help communities and individuals thrive.

We operate a 23 acre farm and we do this by teaching interdependence with the land through education, farming, creation, journeying, and cooking – inspiring personal connections while shaping and honoring life.

GROW RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS
NEYMAR JR
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SCHOOL LAND EXPERIENCE

Nine different schools from the Houston and Austin area come to Blackwood for a Land Experience. The schools integrate the land, farm and kitchen into their curriculum. The duration of their experience varies from school to school with a minimum of 3 days and a maximum of 10 days. We offer a space to operate as a small community rather than simply a brief field trip.

The students and teachers create meals together, tackle farm projects with staff, plunge their hands in the ground to learn where their food comes from and how they manage their waste afterward.

When they leave the urban environment the daily farm routines require a different set of responsibilities here at Blackwood. The skills the students learn here improve their academic experience, inspires practical application of classroom lessons and encourages nature connection vital to development as a responsible citizen.

Camp Director Molly Schriber showing campers the uses of Monarda.

CULIVATING A FARM IN THE 21ST CENTRURY

EXPERIMENTAL FARM & EDUCATION

While the entire piece of land is 24 acres, the cultivated farm area is less than 4 acres. We did this on purpose because our farming philosophy is that only some of the land should be worked while the majority of the land rests and is designated for diverse ecosystem function. This is necessary to sustain a healthy farm. Our Coastal Prairie ecosystem is necessary for our bee hives which in turn is necessary for our crops. The birds that frequent the gardens at the end of summer feed on our sunflower seeds, which in turn is necessary for the natural fertilization of the Coastal Prairie's field of wildflowers. It's a living system.

The Hopscotch Garden and Kitchen Garden make up the farm. The Kitchen Garden has been growing food since the early 90s while the Hopscotch was built in 2010. We added two high tunnels to the Hopscotch garden two years ago for experimentation with growing speciality crops in the harsh Texas climate. In addition to our fruits and vegetables, we are experimenting with ginger, turmeric, bananas, and hops.

The farm at Blackwood is maintained by Hans Hansen, our Head Horticulturist and many loyal volunteers. Every Thursday at Blackwood is Volunteer Day and we are so privileged to work with the best volunteers in our area. Anyone with an interest in gardening and farming can join during this time. The core volunteer team run by Head Volunteer, Bev Points, was nicknamed the Divas. The volunteers bring incredible value to the farm and we, in turn, share our farming expertise with

them. Early this fall, we added one hour presentations to give the volunteers something extra for their time. These presentation include seed saving, bee keeping, soil amendment and more.

At Blackwood, we emphasize heavily on soil quality as it is a piece of our farming philosophy that is non-negotiable. The nutrient levels of our soil and as a result the produce we grow is 40% more nutritious than conventional produce at grocery stores. The care we take with our soil, surrounding ecosystems and other farm practices also influences the flavor of our produce.

As a result of the flavor, freshness and locality, Blackwood became the home of Chef Cade Conlon's catering kitchen called Long Spoon Catering and Education. Many Blackwood events celebrate the closer relationship of our farm to our kitchen. Chef Cade is often found experimenting with home grown flavor such as purple carrot ice cream with subtle hints of ginger.

As a result of our staff and volunteers' work, Blackwood yields Blackwood Bounty officially closed our CSA (community supported agriculture) in January 2014. It was strategic decision for us as the mission of Blackwood grows. Our goal is supply Blackwood events with majority of it's produce needs and the remainder will be available for market. In the interim, our produce is used in a number of different ways. Much of our produce is sold at a farmer's market in Garden Oaks called The Petrol Station every Saturday. A portion is donated to Society of Samaritans in Magnolia, Texas and some is distributed to our loyal volunteers.

In 2014, we wanted to answer questions such as: how do we change the idea of farms being ugly, dirty places and farmers as debt-heavy, of low socio-economic status and unintelligent? We want farms to be beautiful spaces and we want Texas farmers to be known as intelligent and creative citizens.

Many of our farmer friends joke about the pristine grounds we maintain. We're still convincing them that farms can be neat and tidy too. Our long term goal is to demonstrate what it means to be a farm in the 21st Century. We will continue searching for answers as we move into 2015 with new questions.

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THE FARMER DIARIES

TWO THOUSAND THIRTEEN

SEPTEMBER

- Blackwood Bounty CSA membership roster fills briskly and before deadline we had 25 families, while most Houston CSAs membership rosters have been in steady decline over the past 1.5 years.
- For a vegetable CSA, Hans believe the reason Blackwood Bounty maintained loyalty of membership was because we provided an unusual variety of high quality vegetables consistently with on time delivery, with information of the vegetables and their attributes and how to prepare them, with direct excellent personal connection with our membership.
- Bryan-College Station agrees to co-ordinate among their group for on-site farm pick-up on Tuesdays. This saves over 2 hours of delivery time for Blackwood Bounty personnel.
- Excellent volunteer turnout during the month. All veggie crops for fall season have been planted and are looking good.
- Farmhouse and Georgia's Market are purchasing early CSA produce (mostly eggplant, okra, sweet potato greens, bulb fennel). On-site farm pick-up.
- Surplus-surplus goes to a local food pantry SOS, Magnolia (First Baptist Church), where Head Farm Volunteer, Beverly Points, has been a long standing volunteer. Produce is delivered to the pantry by Bev after volunteer day harvest, or by Hans on his way home from Blackwood.
- Hans attends Agrilife Extension workshops: High Tunnel Strawberry / Vegetable Production and Aquaponics

OCTOBER

- Fall-Winter CSA Season begins.
- Excellent CSA harvests. CSA members were promised 8 vegetable items per week and our CSA bags usually contained 10, sometimes more. The additional veggies were a bonus or considered educational items not yet available as farmers market standards but had high sustainable yield, nutritional and gourmet profiles (e.g., Golden Purslane, Amaranth Greens, Sweet Potato Greens). Hans provided information and recipes on these items in his weekly newsletter.
- Montessori students work with Hans and CSA volunteer staff in harvest and planting activities.
- Hans volunteers to be a Garden Docent at Dr. Bob Randall and Nancy Edwards' home for Blackwood's Edible Garden Tour. Dr. Randall is the founder of Urban Harvest in Houston.
- Wonderful volunteer turn-out through the month – mostly CSA harvesting and planting.
- Surplus veggie sales continues with Farmhouse, Georgia's and SOS food pantry.

NOVEMBER

- Fall-Winter CSA Season continues smoothly with excellent harvests.
- Hans hosts one of the table at Blackwood's Earth Dinner at a private home in Houston.
- Good volunteer turn-out, student participation continues in planting and harvests.
- CSA made it through November without frost loss (relief!).

DECEMBER

- CSA season closes (December 21st) without major freeze/frost loss.
- Fall-Winter 2013 was one of our best CSA seasons - for produce variety, quality and service.
- From the tunnels we harvest tomatoes, peppers and greens. Most veggies remained strong while open-field veggie production slowed to a stop due to frost. This allowed us to finish our CSA season very strong with unusually good looking produce to the end.
- Our first season of ginger cultivation in our tunnels was a success. Ginger seems to be very promising as a tunnel crop for Texas growers. As far as Hans knows, we are the only commercial growers of ginger in Southeast Texas. Ginger has proven profitable in the Northeast and Midwest especially for organic growers.

TWO THOUSAND FOURTEEN

JANUARY

- TOFGA 2014 Pre-Conference in partnership with Holistic Management International (HMI) was held at Blackwood. This is one of Blackwood's first big bookings for the new conference facility. This event was one of the highlights of the TOFGA Conference, and one the best attended. Judy Secrest was the keynote speaker. Cath and Hans provided tours complementing Judy's presentation with real examples of sustainable practices on the property. Both were models of HMI's sustainable land management philosophy.
- Blackwood Bounty CSA officially closes. Farm production is now apart of Blackwood Land and Long Spoon catering events. Crop surplus is to go to farmers market in Houston calledThe Farm Stand at Petrol Station in Garden Oaks. Cade takes produce in with him on Fridays for pick-up by Happy Heart Farm owner and vendor, Cathy Sullivan.
- Hans trains Jesse Galvan, Blackwood's new Land Manager, for managing the vegetable area maintenance activities. Jesse is a quick study of basic maintenance procedure.
- Spring vegetable propagation is on schedule and going well.

FEBRUARY

- Spring vegetable starts to go into the ground – no major freeze losses.
- Propagation continues for late Spring and early Summer.
- Jesse and vegetable crew is making good progress on tunnel management including preventive insect and disease strategies, watering, weeding and temperature management.
- Volunteer crew holds strong and continues to show on cold days. Volunteers work mostly in the tunnels and propagation shed on cold days.
- Hans and neighbor, Cynthia Masters, strike a pooh deal. Free of charge, Cynthia Masters will make alpaca pooh and litter available (average 2 spreader fulls per week). Major success! Hans begins to apply to fields, turning it under.
- Research on Zone 10 and 11 tunnel crops begins. Very promising including crops such as dwarf banana and ginger.
- Greenhouse propagation continues including summer vegetable starts.

MARCH

- Blackwood Bounty's first vegetable delivery goes to farmers market (The Farm Stand at Petrol Station) with quick vegetable sales. The market experienced some of the best market days they've ever had for March. They attributed the surge to the draw for produce.
- Volunteer turnout continues to be strong while student participation in Thursday activities continues as well.
- Greenhouse seedlings go to the field with no major losses due to late freezes.
- Early tunnel tomato harvests.
- Jesse and Jorge master temperature control of high tunnels and greenhouse.
- Great farm interns this month from different Montessori schools.

APRIL

- Similar to the month of March. Late April frost but no major damage.
- Ginger "nursery" planted in the west tunnel as the first phase of ginger expansion.
- Jesse and Jorge getting in the groove on basic garden and tunnel maintenance.
- Great results from areas where paca pooh and liter has been integrated and planted.

MAY

- Continued strong turn-out for volunteer day as well as great farmer's market turn-out.
- Beginning of excellent field tomato crop this year.
- Great sunflower bio-belt production (next to Hopscotch Garden). Noted that flowers are providing food and habitat for a number of native pollinators and beneficial insects.

JUNE

- Sunflower bio-belt attracts a wide array of birds who are feeding on the sunflower seed. Hans selects prime heads for next generation of plantings.
- Nice harvests of summer produce. The great tomato crop continues.

JULY

- Ginger crop is doing very well in the high-tunnels and is responding well to the hot humid tunnel conditions.
- Continuing to amend and build Hopscotch Garden soil with free paca pooh and litter from next door. Excellent progression of soil improvement.
- Fall seedling propagation begins.

AUGUST

- Workshop Thursday begins with great success. Volunteer Sharon Boudreau takes the volunteer group through inspection and maintenance of the “top bar” hive near the Utility Building.
- Fall propagation continues.

SEPTEMBER

- Hans started the month with a workshop called “Propagation Thursday”. Topics included mixing custom propagation soil and fertilizer, fall and winter seeds planted by participants. Hans shared tips on starting seeds successfully during hot summer weather.
- Offered “Compost Thursday” workshop. Hans explained compost making fundamentals, raw materials, compost crops. He demonstrated with intern Michael Hanan how to make a compost windrow with manure spreader and how to make a simple backyard system.
- Offered Seed Saving Thursday workshop. The presenter was Pam Wood Kimsey of Seed Traders for Future Generations and Thyme Square Gardens. Pam has a robust following social media following with both groups. She lives in Waller County.

2014 FARMER HIGHLIGHTS

SOIL. The soil in the High Tunnels and Hopscotch Garden has finally cured and stabilized, is very biologically active, from over two years of intensive compost, cover crops, green manure, alpaca manure and the addition custom blended minerals.

MAINTENANCE. Excellent base maintenance of the vegetable gardens by Jesse Galvan and Jorge Sierra. They keep the gardens and tunnels watered, weeded, neat, tunnels and greenhouse opened and closed for temperature control while assisting with vegetable harvest and processing.

WEEDS. Weed seed reserve was near exhaustion in Hopscotch Garden by January 2014. The time required weeding is a fraction of what it was when we first broke ground. This was an extraordinary accomplishment due to much focused effort to exhaust the soil weed seed reserve through diligent removal of weeds before depositing more seed.

CROP YIELD. With the soil improvement, compost and mineral applications, we are noting exceptional vegetable plants, specifically extraordinary size of vegetables during peak season for particular crop.

Increased CSA vegetable productivity after the expansion of the Kitchen Garden in spring of 2013.

PESTS. We are noting that insect and disease issues have decreased for most crops except for squash and tomatoes. Hans believes we just had a bad year for both. Our spring crop of field tomatoes and our fall crop of squash are two of our best.

HIGH TUNNELS. Excellent season extension in our high tunnels through the Summer months for vegetables we would not normally grow during those months including pac choy, salad turnips, carrots, bulb fennel, mustard, mizuna and kale. Our high tunnels are under 40% sunlight block and shade cloth. We hope to continue this experimentation.

Improved quality of summer vegetables in tunnels include green onion, leek, arugula, leaf amaranth.

Exceptionally early plantings in tunnels (specifically July) include broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and tomatoes.

BOUNTY RED OKRA. First season of our own okra variety called Bounty Red Okra, a cross between heirlooms Beck's Giant Pod and Burgundy Okra. Cross pollinated executed by our CSA volunteers.

DISTRIBUTION. Surplus Summer and Fall produce purchased by: Farmhouse, Georgia's Market with an on-farm pick-up.

Surplus surplus produce is donated to Society of Samaritans (SOS), a food bank operated by First Baptist Church of Magnolia. Head volunteer Beverly Points and Hans delivers the produce on their return home to Magnolia.

EXTENDED LIFE OF PRODUCE. Improved quality of produce leaving the farm and increased fresh storage for our CSA members and customers due to the availability of our new walk-in coolers. We are able to harvest, quickly chill and keep produce chilled until delivery.

HARVEST EFFECTIVELY. Improved produce harvest and storage capacity efficiency. This is less stress on big harvest days due to availability of our walk-in coolers. We can now stretch our harvesting of vegetable items that store well including beans, peppers, tomatoes, non-greens items through the week.

FACILITIES IMPROVEMENTS. Improved processing and efficiency due to our new Utility Building vegetable processing facility. New vegetable facilities include propagation room, high tunnels and vegetable processing and storage facilities. In addition, improved garden and orchard areas provide an excellent demonstration and educational setting for our volunteers, students, participants interested in small and medium scale vegetable and fruit production, as well as homesteading and resiliency skills.

CREATE COMMUNITY GATHERING

Opposite page: Pliny Fisk III was the 2014 Gulf Coast Bioneers keynote speaker. This page: Houston Cats Corner offered a leadership and dance workshop at Gulf Coast Bioneers.

OUTREACH & EVENTS

October 25, 2013

Edible Garden Tour / Blackwood hosted our very first Edible Garden Tour. We had 125 people in attendance. Our goal was to give examples of how it might look for someone thinking about growing some of their own food at home. We had very manicured gardens and others that were very sophisticated in soil science. We transplanted our philosophy of good soil equals more nutritious produce to Houston's home gardens. If the nutrients are in the soil, how can they be in the food?

Many garden hosts provided snacks they made themselves. Blackwood provided ginger lemonade and gazpacho with almost all ingredients from the gardens.

November 8, 2013

Earth Dinner / Blackwood presented an Earth Dinner that we co hosted with Organic Valley. The dinner was held at the home of Bill Baldwin where Long Spoon catered a lovely local dinner with 125 people in attendance. Each table was hosted by a local hero guiding the conversations in ways that encouraged folks to talk about ways they have celebrated food in their lives.

Jane Weiner was our keynote speaker that night. Jane explained that, "we are all sparkle ponies". She described: "the word that elicits fear in my soul is the word "COMPLACENCY" [and] defined as 'a feeling of smug or uncritical satisfaction with one's own achievement or self, an instance of contented self satisfaction.'

Complacency is almost invisible, it is the place of the status quo."

April 12, 2014

Earth Day Houston / This was Blackwood's ninth year as a Zone Captain at Earth Day Houston presented by Air Alliance Houston. For the previous 8 years, we were the Zone Captain for the Sustainability Zone with great success. In 2014, the Kid's Zone needed energy so we shifted to lead there. We served 15,000 people at the 2014 Earth Day Houston. We made mud pies, watched bees hive life through exhibition windows. Kids harvested water and provided a stationary bike that easily demonstrated the difference between the energy needed to power an incandescent light build and an LED bulb. We also educated families on straw bale construction. We displayed a big cornucopia of veggies that we gave away. We also made soap that we used to clean hands after we made mud pies. It was a great success!

May 10, 2014

Secret Garden Party / We hosted our annual fundraiser at Bill Baldwin's house in Historic Heights. Janice Van Dyke Walden helped us to organize over 100 auction items. Star Massing aided us with a partnership with the Art Institute of Houston for the backyard decorum. We honored Michael Skelly with The 2014 Green Wellie Award.

October 26, 2014

Edible Garden Tour / This year, we kicked off the Edible Garden Tour with The Culture of Soil Fertility Workshop taught by our Head Horticulturist, Hans Hansen. The workshops were offered at Down House Restaurant on Yale Street and Cafe Brasil on Dunlavy.

Afterward, we chose 10 gardens around Houston to showcase as examples of what Houstonians can to replace or compliment their grassy landscapes. Guests were very impressed by the diversity of the gardens. We offered the amateur to professional kept, herb exclusive to permaculture infused. Two of the gardens we showed were installed by business who maintain gardens for residences. We showed one business this year who had the wild idea to install an edible garden instead of a retention ponds to comply with city ordinance.

The Wave Houston offered an optional full day or half day bus tour. Long Spoon catered fun and delicious snacks at three different locations and our bartenders were just the nicest guys.

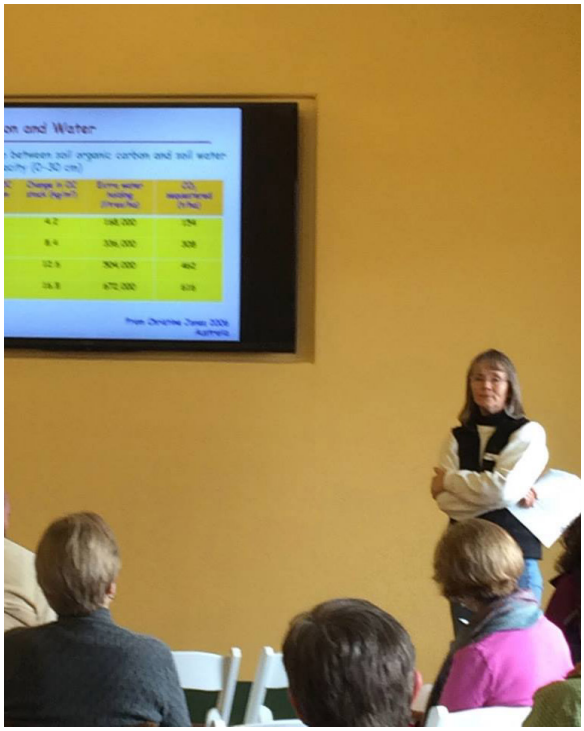
November 2, 2014

Gulf Coast Bioneers Conference / This year we succeed in hosting the 12th Gulf Coast Bioneers Conference at Blackwood the first time. Pliny Fisk III, from

the Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems in Austin, Texas, was our keynote speaker. Pliny's work
tackled society's biggest problems with the development of his "Lens". These are visual protocols to build a maximum sustainable future.
Funky Art Café in Brenham, Texas catered a tasty lasagna lunch with grass feed beef, local vegetables, and Texas-grown Gala apple dessert.

Our panelists and breakout session speakers introduced and revisited topics relevant to resiliency, future proofing and the human connection such as wild foods and nutrition, rainwater harvesting, sustainable legacies in Houston, dealing with climate change on Texas farms and so many other thought provoking presentations. Please see gulfcoastbioneers.org for a full list of speakers.

After the conference, we hosted a farm dinner outside the porch at Baleyfield. Chef Dillion and Chef Denver from Ray's Country Grill in Fulshear, Texas, prepared a sensational South Indian meal. Most of the produce was grown on our farm including okra, beans, serranos, lemon grass, cucumber, golden beets, eggplant and fennel.



Left photo: TOFGA pre-Conference held at Blackwood in January 2014. Anne Jacobson speaking at panel on *Women's Disempowerment: How subtle is it?* at Gulf Coast Bioneers in November 2014.

INSTILL A SENSE OF WONDER

BLACKWOOD NATURE CAMP

In 2014, we sold all the spots for camp. Blackwood offered 3 sessions of camp during the months of June and July. We kicked off camp with Counselor Training Week, a mandatory session for all Counselors In Training (CIT) and counselors.

We offer full and partial camp scholarships to 50-60% of campers. The campers all sleep in Baleyfield House, a straw bale construction. The new Gathering Hall facility is our main indoor recreation area, but we are outside most of the day and only come inside to escape the hottest part of the day. These kids run like crazy and film awesome experiences with two GoPro cameras.

Each camp session is 5 days and 4 nights filled with games through the woods, traditional crafts, tracking activities, trips to Lake Summerville, cooking classes, documentary viewing, swimming and other fun. Each week is a little different and we mold our programming to fit the group dynamic. We remain small so that we are able to be flexible and family-like.

A special thanks to our guest speakers. Journey-Through's artist Heath Brodie created site-specific mandalas with the campers. Mark Illian, from Nature Healing Nature, took them on a tour of the rainwater harvesting systems at Blackwood. Clint Pustejovsky, the Snake Man did an interactive presentation with all his favorite reptiles including his huge albino python named Bubba. Mary Anne Weber brought two birds of prey including a Mississippi Kite to inform the campers about bird conservation.

THE NUMBERS

365 days of sustainable farm production

3.5 acres of farmland in production

10 taught Land Experiences between 3 - 10 days each

59 full days students spent at Blackwood

337 students came to Blackwood

18 days of conferences, workshops & trainings

145 participants in conferences, workshops & trainings

600 people attended Blackwood Houston area events

15 days of summer camp

96 campers came to Blackwood Nature Camp

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OUR FINANCIALS

2014 Income

Events/Retreats	$61,080	46%
Schools Land Experience	$39,742	30%
Wilderness Medicine Training	$14,968	11%
Donations	$11,565	9%
Other	$6,185	5%
Total	**$133,540**	**100%**

2014 Expenses

Educational	$38,698	27%
Fund Raiser	$24,036	17%
General and Admininstration	$80,237	55%
Other	$489	1%
Total	**$143,459**	**100%**

Statement of Financial Position

Total Assets	$3,619
Total Liabilities	$7,207
Unrestricted Net Assets	($3,588)
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	**$3,619**

THANK YOU

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL TO OUR SUPPORTERS, VOLUNTEERS, BOARD MEMBERS AND STAFF.

Gifts from individuals and institutions make our work possible.
Please accept our heartfelt gratitude.

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Jorge Contreras

Jesse Galvan

Gabriel Contreras

Martha Padron

Blackwood Educational Land Institute is eternally grateful to our volunteers. These incredible people do their best to volunteer every Thursday morning. Their hard work is vital to everything we do here and Blackwood's farm would not be the flourishing land it is without them!

FARM VOLUNTEERS

Beverly Points

Lisa & Mike Eck

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