For the Joy and Peace of All

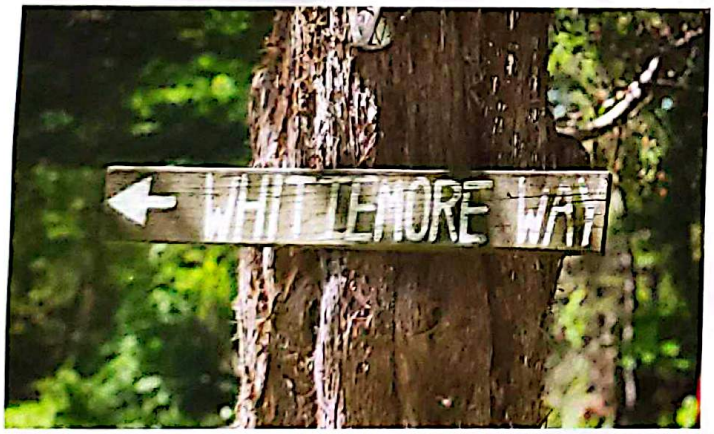
Whittemore CCC's Meditation Labyrinth is unveiled for their 10th Anniversary!

By Sara Catherine Smith

Photos by Erin Kiernan



Friends' President, Carolyn Thow (center) with Director of Wellness, Carl Klemme (right), and volunteer, Cole Klemme (left).





It's a sweltering summer morning as bees flit from one flower to the next. A heron glides overhead, while dozens of people meander through the buzzing wildflowers and tall grasses at Whittemore CCC's (Community, Culture and Conservation) recent dedication of their labyrinth, the culmination of a years-long effort by WCCC's Director of Wellness, Carl Klemme, to create a meditation circuit in the heart of the Tewksbury nature preserve.

The labyrinth is one of several meditation spots tucked along WCCC's 11 miles of trails, where passersby can rest on oak benches hand-carved by artist David Horowitz. While you take in the serene surroundings, you can scan a QR code for guided meditations by Carl created to tune you into the immediate environment: one flows along with the water of the Rockaway Creek; another fills your lungs with the scent of fresh towering pines; a third takes in a hilltop view. The labyrinth is the final stop and winds through an intricate arrangement of river rocks in the center of a large pollinator field. Stone-lined paths swirl out from the center, creating a circle to represent feminine energy, while a square border surrounds the labyrinth, representing masculine energy. "All the rocks came from the property for the square, and the circle all came out of the river edge that borders the Rockaway Creek," Carl explained. Except for four significantly large boulders from the creek each stone was placed by hand.

Wandering the labyrinth is grounding. Each slow step you take, weaving back and forth as the labyrinth snakes along, makes you

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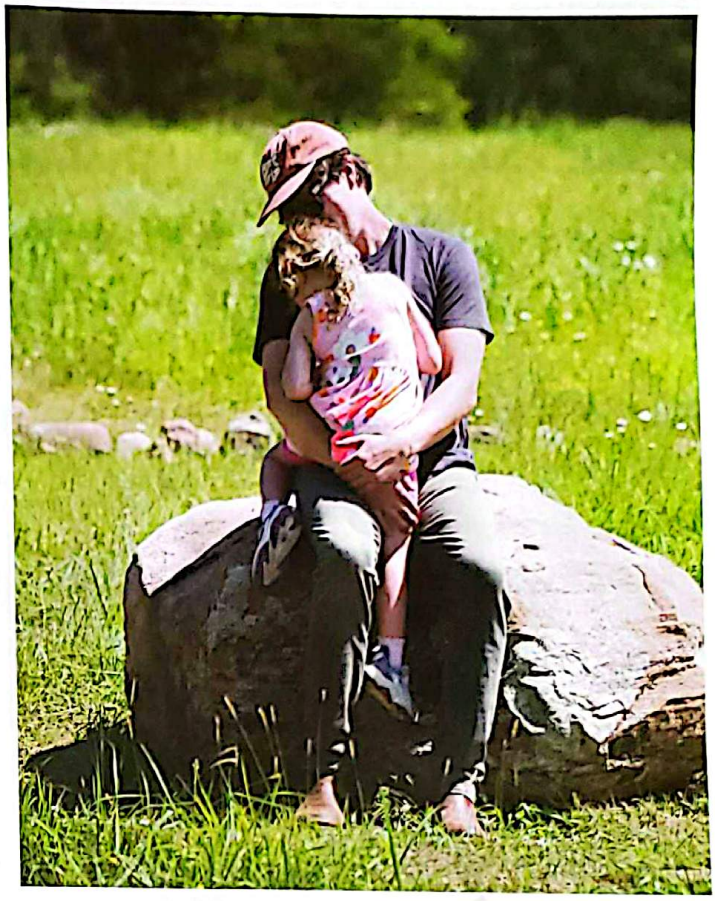
fully present in the moment. Wildflowers sway in the breeze. Insects hum in the heat. Birdsong calms your mind. Your breath may slow, your heart beating in sync with the flow of nature. Each boulder marks the cardinal directions, leading you to spend a little time in each direction before centering yourself in the middle. "In the middle, you're in the hub of the wheel, so there's no direction. You're just in that still point," said Carl.

The labyrinth's creation was a labor of love and community. Four river birch trees donated by Ann Klemme and planted by Limbach's Landscaping in the labyrinth's corners will one day provide shade. Carl also partnered with Dylan Culver and Alexandra

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Gerrad of Sourland Outdoor Spaces to build the labyrinth, with tremendous help from his 13-year-old son, Cole, Cole's Boy Scout Troop, and George Contrino of Evening Shade Landscaping. "If you want to achieve something, you really have to put your mind to it," Cole said, reflecting back on the physical labor of constructing the labyrinth. "And the more you want it, the closer you're going to be to getting it."

The dedication is part of WCCC's 10-year anniversary celebration and tied together many of the initiatives and collaborations they have built over the years. Through their "Food Makes





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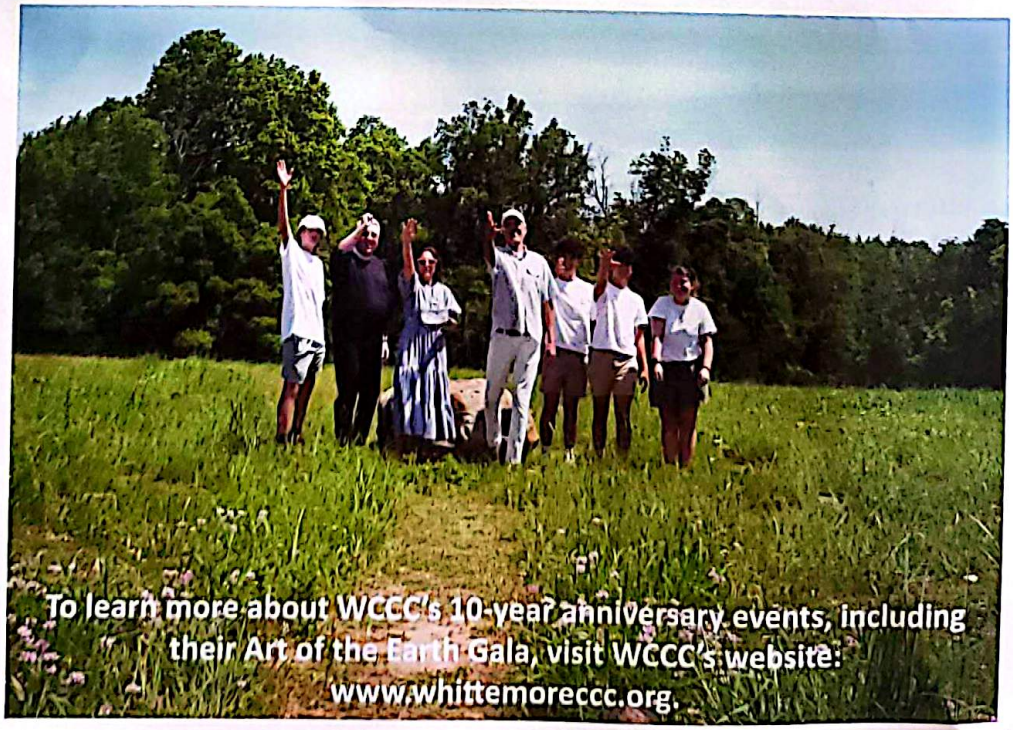
Friends" partnerships, attendees were served pound cake made with flour grown and milled locally by River Valley Community Grains, while musicians Dani Fuschetti and Tim Ryan livened the field with their exhilarating bluegrass. Images of former WCCC resident artist Eli Porter Trubert's nature-based mandalas graced the trail leading to the labyrinth, creating the vibe for the ceremony to come.

"The dedication of our Mindful Labyrinth and the completion of our Meditation Trail embody who we have become over the past decade," said Friends of Whittemore CCC President, Caroline Thow. "Ten years ago, we set out to create a place where community, culture, and conservation could thrive together. Today visitors can journey through our woodlands, pause at five meditation stations and arrive at the Labyrinth — a space for reflection, healing, and renewal. It is the culmination of years of vision, collaboration and stewardship and a lasting gift to our community that reflects the heart of Whittemore's mission. As we look ahead to the next ten years, we hope these spaces will continue to inspire connection with nature, with one another, and with ourselves."

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Reverend Tim Mulder formally christened the labyrinth with a blessing, and lead Carolyn, Carl, Cole, and other volunteers in baptizing each directional stone with sacred water. The space came alive, the energy growing with each breath. "You look at rocks, you look at flowers, you look at grass, you look at space," preached Reverend Mulder. "And that's really the goal of the labyrinth: We get in touch with the ground that supports us each day. We get in touch with the air that fills our lungs, with the sky that greets our eyes. We connect. We connect with ourselves. We connect with the nature around us. We connect with the environment. We connect with the whole world."

As the final stone was blessed, Reverend Mulder blessed the attendees with a 3,000 year-old prayer, which will extend to all who visit this labyrinth for years to come. "May you go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The hills and mountains before you shall break forth in your singing, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Let us go forth for the joy and peace of all that has made us, of all that sustains us, of all that motivates us, and all that propels us into the world. Go in peace."



To learn more about WCCC's 10-year anniversary events, including their Art of the Earth Gala, visit WCCC's website: www.whittemoreccc.org.

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