

gral of over 1,000 contiguous acres of preserved land.

Creating the Environmental Education Center We soon recognized that the assembling of such a large holding of environmentally important land brought with it management challenges. There would be a need to carefully manage and maintain these lands and at the same time provide the public access through an environmental education program and an accompanying facility. In 1998 we initiated discussions with the New Jersey Audubon Society. Audubon possessed the expertise to care for the land and offer the programs we sought. The Preserve site offered Audubon the opportunity to provide an environmental center in a part of the state where they did not have a presence. Another critical partnership was established.

In August 2001, we formally approved plans for the 6,560 square foot Environmental Education Center that would be owned by Plainsboro and operated by the New Jersey Audubon

Society. The Center would serve as the operating and administrative headquarters for The Plainsboro Preserve. Located at the edge of McCormack Lake, it would have an 18-foot by 30-foot two-story glass window, an amphitheater for educational classes and seminars, two large classrooms, a resource library, an interactive pond experience room, a nature bookstore, and a wide array of hands-on exhibits and displays for people of all ages.

We formed The Plainsboro Preserve Advisory Committee, and by reaching out to the public gained the support of 16 environmental, civic and regional planning groups, as well as many members of the general public. Within six months of public announcement the plans, \$1.4 million—100 percent of the cost of the new Center—was raised through grants and donations. We worked with Congressman Rush Holt to secure two federal grants totaling \$600,000, with state Senator Peter Inverso for a \$100,000 grant from the State of New Jersey, and with our corporate community, including major

funding by Merrill Lynch (\$200,000), Bristol Myers Squibb, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Carlton Homes (each contributing \$50,000), with various other companies and individuals contributing the remainder.

We broke ground on the Center in the summer of 2002, and on May 19, 2003 the new Environmental Education Center was officially dedicated at a ceremony at the Preserve. Numerous state, county, regional and local officials, students and residents attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

The Plainsboro Preserve today is a regional treasure that provides a beautiful, undisturbed setting to study and observe the quiet wonders of nature. Increasing numbers of area residents and school children from throughout the region are visiting the Environmental Center. Through careful planning, persistence and the help of many generous partners we are now able to extend the invitation to explore one of the region's most significant ecological treasures. ■