



CHAPTER SEVEN

ESTABLISHING CLEAR GOALS AND WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY: *Rockefeller Preserve Collaboration*

THE ISSUE

The Rockefeller State Park Preserve is a scenic slice of undeveloped land on the banks of the Hudson River. Its woodlands, meadows, lake, and streams are laced with a unique system of carriage roads and superb views of the Hudson River. As one of the last remaining undeveloped tracts in lower Westchester County, the Preserve supports an abundance of wildlife including geese, deer, brown trout, bass woodpeckers, buffalo, birds, wild turkeys, coyotes, and hoot owls. Its visitor center and staff naturalist provide exhibits and guided walks on the natural and historic wonders of the Preserve.

Donated to the State of New York by the Rockefeller family, the Preserve became a state park in 1983. Since then, the family has deeded additional pieces of land from its adjacent property at Pocantico Hills, and with the 1998 donation from Laurance S. Rockefeller of Rockwood Hall, the Preserve now totals just over 950 acres.

The Preserve also enjoys a strong base of local support. It is used regularly by hikers and strollers, birdwatchers, anglers, cross-country skiers, and equestrians.

Starting an organization is not easy. The collaboration has been a wonderful support center in getting this organization started.

George Gumina
Sponsor

*Rockefeller Preserve Collaboration
Summary Information*

Started:	1997
\$ Distributed (as of 11/01/00):	\$20,500
Grant Range:	\$10,000
# of Grants (as of 11/01/00):	2
Sponsors:	Clare Buden, George Gumina, Rachel Gumina, Carol Lyden, Kimberly Rockefeller, Steven Rockefeller, Jr. and Lucy Waletzky
Key Partners:	The Friends of the Rockefeller Park Preserve; State of New York Parks
Staff:	Salvatore LaSpada, Sherman Bilal
Current Status:	Ongoing

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

The Rockefellers are literally neighbors to the Preserve. They still own and live on adjacent property and, like many in the nearby community, take a great interest in its health and preservation. This interest was largely manifest through the involvement of Peggy Rockefeller, who “was a guardian over all the property” says her nephew and sponsor, George Gumina.

Rather than hand over this land to the State and take no further interest in it, the Rockefeller family took crucial steps to ensure the long-term vitality of the Preserve. First, at the time of the land donation, the family set up an endowment of \$3 million, which is managed by the State of New York. Income from the endowment is used to maintain the Preserve.

While this endowment is helpful, the family realized that “the success of the Preserve hinges on getting people in Westchester community to see the Park as theirs,” said Steven Rockefeller. The family also understood that mobilizing the energy of public support would be best accomplished through creating an authentic partnership between parks, community leaders, and local people. To ensure its

long-term health and vitality, the family wanted to develop a structure for the consistent and continued support and involvement of the community. And after Peggy Rockefeller's death, this community support became even more critical.

Thus, George Gumina spoke with other family members about starting a "Friends" group "in memory of Aunt Peggy" that could take over her watchdog role. Friends groups are concerned volunteers who protect and support parks through service, advocacy, and charitable giving. The number of Friends groups has grown rapidly in the past twenty years, helping to fill the void left by shrinking and fluctuating budgets for parks and natural areas.

Therefore, the family set up the Rockefeller Preserve Collaboration in TPC in 1997 to provide the funding and technical assistance needed to create a local Friends group.

INITIAL GRANTMAKING

The family members heading up the Rockefeller Preserve Collaboration had little experience establishing a new nonprofit. TPC staff provided extensive hands-on technical assistance to help get the Friends group off the ground. As an incubator for the Friends group, TPC staff helped family members navigate the complex legal, financial, and administrative questions associated with starting a new organization. "Having something like the collaboration assisting the Friends—who knew about similar organizations, who knew what to watch for and what to avoid—was really important," says Preserve Manager John Middlebrooks.

The collaboration also provided start-up funding—support that is often difficult to secure—thus providing initial stability to the group. It also provided a mechanism for family members to support the Preserve financially.

PROGRAM EVOLUTION

The Friends of the Rockefeller Park Preserve was launched in 1997. The Friends' mission is to encourage public participation, education and support to effectively protect and manage the Preserve's wildlife, habitat, and historic and archeological features. The Friends act as an advocate, as well as a sounding board and a conduit for community concerns to the state.

Former TPC staff member Sal LaSpada and Rockefeller family members sit on the Friends' board, alongside community members. "There are some talented, professional individuals in the family. It's not just their money," says manager John Middlebrooks, "The talent and interest they bring to the table is just as vital and critical."

Working closely with the State, the Friends aid in the restoration and maintenance of the Preserve's distinctive system of carriage roads and pastoral landscapes. The Friends also foster relevant educational programs. Friends' support has ranged from the construction of a butterfly habitat garden to a program for nearby high school students to gain photojournalism and writing skills during weekly visits to the Preserve. As a nonprofit, the Friends group is also able to perform functions that the state cannot, such as fundraising, special events, and coordinating volunteers, all of which help to ease the impact of the state's budget fluctuations.

The Friends present new opportunities for joint endeavors between park users and the State to pursue common goals. "This is a great example of a public-private partnership," says Preserve Manager John Middlebrooks.

ENDING THE COLLABORATION

The leadership of the Rockefeller Family has helped transform the Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve into an important community group capable of providing the sustained support needed for the Preserve. The family considers the collaboration to be successful because "now the Friends is a community organization, not a family organization," says George Gumina.

Although the collaboration has succeeded in spinning off the Friends group, sponsors think of the collaboration as existing indefinitely. In their view, the collaboration serves as a "neutral" vehicle through which other funders—including family members—can best work cooperatively in planning and implementing a fundraising and grantmaking program for the Preserve. Most recently, the collaboration handled contributions to resurface the trails and benches and maintain the dogwood trees that were made and planted in honor of David Rockefeller's 85th birthday and Laurance Rockefeller's 90th birthday. Future Collaboration plans include building up the endowment for the long-term maintenance of the Preserve ark and allocating grants toward enhancing the Preserve educational programs. Collaboration sponsors will also continue to serve as board members of the Friends group.