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Hitchcock Center for the Environment Announces Site and Design Team for its New Building

AMHERST, Mass. – The Hitchcock Center for the Environment and Hampshire College have identified an ideal site on the college’s campus for the Center’s state-of-the-art sustainable building incorporating ecological design principles. The Hampshire College Board of Trustees approved a location on Route 116 in South Amherst, between the Red Barn and the College’s Farm Center site. In addition, the Center is pleased to have selected designLAB Architects of Boston to lead the Center through a visionary, integrated design process.

designLAB, led by architects Robert Miklos and Sam Batchelor, brings a strong team of local and regional architects, landscape architects, sustainability consultants, engineers, and exhibit designers to the project. “designLAB architects is thrilled to join the dynamic and collaborative team that the Hitchcock Center for the Environment has assembled for this important project”, said Sam Batchelor. “We look forward to an engaging journey, wherein the values of environmental awareness and literacy shape our process and our goals. We are excited about the creation of a new home for the center—one that represents the values we hope to live by, fosters dialogue with the natural world, and continues to live and grow with the future of the organization.” The studio is a national leader in the design of cultural and environmental facilities, leveraging each building project to promote the mission and values of the institutions they serve.

The new site at Hampshire College and the design team that we have selected will bring to reality our vision for an education center that seamlessly integrates the building and the surrounding natural landscape. It will be an exciting and unique place for teaching environmental sustainability.

–Sarah la Cour, Chair, Hitchcock Center Building Committee

One year ago the Hitchcock Center announced its emerging partnership with Hampshire College. After conducting the necessary site feasibility studies, the final decision on the Center’s preferred site was formally adopted by the Hampshire College Board of Trustees.

The site is ideally suited for our new environmental learning center. The Center is proud to be growing but we are unable to meet all of the requests for programs because of our current space limitations. The proposed new 7,000 square foot building will significantly increase the number of people, especially children, we serve while providing inspiring indoor and outdoor classrooms, accessibility to many communities through public transportation, multiple points of collaboration with Hampshire College, and access to the building's beautifully diverse surrounding habitats.

–Julie Johnson, Executive Director, Hitchcock Center for the Environment

We are looking forward to welcoming the Hitchcock Center and its remarkable program to the Hampshire campus and we foresee many wonderful partnerships that the Center's presence will enable. The Hampshire Board's approval of the site and the selection of the Hitchcock Center's design team signal the beginning of an exciting creative process.

–Jonathan Lash, President of Hampshire College

Funding for the project will rely on philanthropic support. The Hitchcock Center for the Environment will begin fundraising in earnest as the planning progresses, reaching out to the local community as well as regional and national funders.

The Hitchcock Center for the Environment and designLAB's team of architects, engineers, landscape architects and exhibit designers will be entering into conceptual design in the next month. "The staff are looking forward to the design process to help create a center with indoor and outdoor spaces that embody the values and ecological concepts that we teach to children, youth, and adults in our programs. We want to create spaces where people will be inspired to explore, motivated to ask questions, and filled with possibility and hope for the future," said Colleen Kelley, Education Director at the Hitchcock Center.

We are thrilled to be forging this relationship with Hampshire College, especially as we celebrate our 50th anniversary. This partnership will help the Hitchcock Center enter a new era as we begin our next 50 years of providing environmental education to future generations.

–Jaana Cutson, President, Board of Directors, Hitchcock Center for the Environment

About the Hitchcock Center for the Environment

The Hitchcock Center for the Environment is an independent nonprofit environmental learning center serving the communities of Western Massachusetts. Founded in 1962 by Ethel Dubois (1906-1987), a former guidance counselor who was deeply inspired by the works of Rachel Carson, the Hitchcock Center was initially known as the Long Plain Nature Center and located on a farm in Leverett. In those early days, the organization provided summer camp and nature programs for low-income children living primarily in Holyoke and Springfield through the support and work of a dedicated group of volunteers. Dubois' simple goal was to provide these children with opportunities otherwise not available to them: to experience the natural world and to develop a sense of wonder about it.

Over the years, the Center changed its name and began offering more programs and services, including new science and nature programs for schools and communities throughout Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin Counties. It moved to its current location at the Larch Hill Conservation Area in 1976, with the generous support of the Town of Amherst. Today, the Center remains true to its core mission to foster a greater awareness and understanding of our environment and to develop environmentally literate citizens.

The Hitchcock Center for the Environment now serves nearly 6,500 children, youth, and adults each year, employs a growing staff of highly skilled environmental educators, and has a service region that encompasses all of western Massachusetts. Since 2000 alone, the Hitchcock Center's programs have more than doubled. Space limitations are hampering the organization's ability to meet rising requests for programs, field trips, and classes. The challenge of growth transpired into a unique opportunity for the Center to once again search for a new home and in the process, translate its core values into a built environment.

For more information on the Center and its 50th anniversary please visit:
www.hitchcockcenter.org.