



NATURE AT THE CENTER: BRINGING NATURE TO ALL

The Case for Nature Sacred

When we seek out nature, we feel better within minutes. More hopeful, connected, our spirits at rest. Science is catching up to what our instincts have told us for centuries. Time in nature heals us physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Now imagine there are no trees in your backyard, no park in your neighborhood, no local farmers market. No nearby nature in which to lift your mood, take a break and a deep breath. For many communities, this is the reality. Even when science tells us we need nature for our health and well-being, individuals and families in many under-resourced urban neighborhoods do not have access to the healing power of nearby nature.

At Nature Sacred, we are collaborating with communities to change their reality, one Sacred Place at a time...

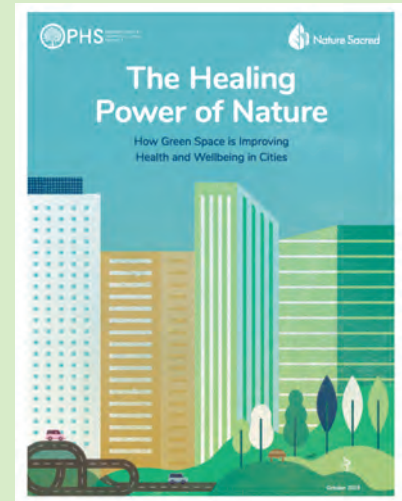
A photograph of a woman sitting on a wooden bench in a lush garden. The garden is filled with various flowers, including purple and yellow ones. The background is a dense forest of green trees. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, cursive font.

*Come Friends, 'Tis not too late
to seek a better world.*

— Journal Entry, Brooklyn Cemetery Landscape

Urbanization—which swallows up natural areas and cuts people off from natural surroundings—is used to explain our weakening connection to nature. However, it is not just urbanization rates that changed over the course of the 20th century but rather, the evolution of technology. The 1950s saw the rapid rise of television. Video games first appeared in the 1970s, followed by the internet in the 1990s. We moved from being a society that gathered in civic and green spaces to one whose citizens spend the majority of our time on screens and indoors.

There are consequences to our rising disconnection from nature—affecting our health, wellness, social connectivity, our institutions, and our environmental resources. Affecting our very souls. However, there are also solutions to the issues technology and a lack of investment in green space have created. Just one example: a team of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine found that simple interventions like vacant lot greening in low-income and blight-ridden neighborhoods—at minimal cost—can dramatically impact the health of those neighborhoods. Within 18 months of the low-cost greening efforts in this study, **those who lived near the “greened” lots reported 40% reduction in feeling depressed and 50% reduction in feeling worthless.**



Science now proves that local green space experience reduces:

- blood pressure,
- hypertension,
- heart disease,
- rates of asthma and
- severe allergies,
- obesity and much more.

Benefits also extend beyond physical health to include:

- Reductions in crime
- Increases in social responsibility and cohesion.



THE GENESIS OF NATURE SACRED: A VISION FOR CHANGE

Nature Sacred was founded in 1996 by avid nature lovers and visionary entrepreneurs **Kitty and Tom Stoner** who recognized the loss of our connection to nature that was a direct result of our reliance on technology in every corner of our daily lives, and in the lack of investment and green infrastructure in under-served urban communities. From the Stoner's informed concern, their desire to help individuals and families connect, and their personal experiences in achieving physical and mental respite from time spent in nature, the idea for Nature Sacred was born.



Nature Sacred Milestones



TKF Foundation

1996

Founded



Open Spaces Sacred Places

2008

Published



Nature Sacred Research Awards

2012

Launched



Nature Sacred Firesoul Network

2018

Launched



Nature Sacred Operating Foundation

2020

Launched



THE MODEL

Nature Sacred's signature model is based on creating nearby, contemplative, community-led green spaces —Sacred Places— that disrupt the economic, racial and cultural barriers to access the health, wellness, social, and environmental benefits that come from regular time spent in nearby nature.

**Nature Sacred goes where the need is greatest.
Our Sacred Places are in hospitals, prisons,
universities, under-resourced communities—
places where healing is needed.**

What is Nature Sacred?



SERVICE PROVIDER AND PARTNER

We help enable the creation of Sacred Places where they are needed most.



NETWORK BUILDER

Our Nature Sacred Network now comprises more than 100 Sacred Places and Firesouls.



RESEARCH AGGREGATOR

We bridge academia and the green space movement.



Headquartered in Annapolis, MD, Nature Sacred has over 100 sites across the country:

- 📖 Engaging 10,000+ people in active programming each year;
- 📖 Collecting thousands of journal entries from visitors on the impact of these spaces;
- 📖 Fostering collaborations with more than 200 community organizations;
- 📖 Capturing 5 million+ gallons of stormwater runoff per year in Sacred Places;
- 📖 Supporting 40+ academic studies/publications exploring the nature/health connection, authenticity and overall beauty.

The demand for our work is only increasing as we continue to engage with communities and partners on the east coast and nationally through our core initiatives:

The Community Healing Initiative: Helping urban communities heal through intentionally designed Sacred Places that heal and uplift community pride/unity.

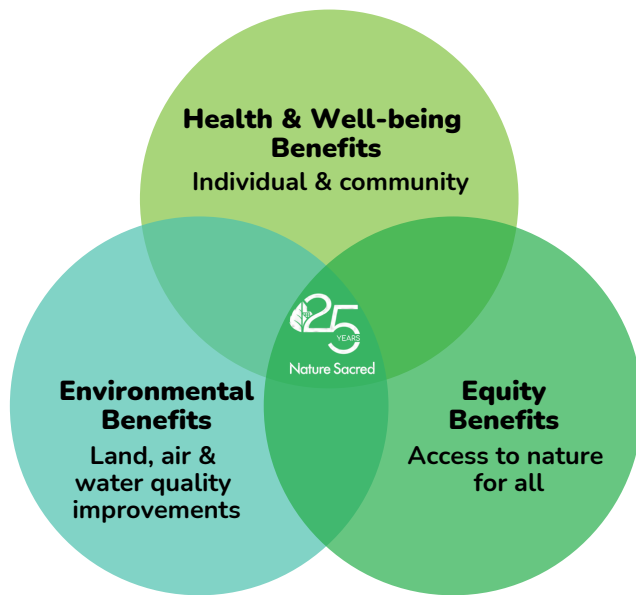
Nature for Wellness | Healthcare: Designed for healthcare organizations and hospitals looking to help physicians, nurses, and staff heal, find respite and renewal in nature.

Nature For Wellness | Education: Tailored to help students, faculty, and staff combat stress and anxiety so prevalent on educational campuses today—through nature.

Nature Sacred believes that good design and access to beauty should be present in every community, regardless of socio-economic limits. We partner with visionary landscape architects who share our belief and who are with us throughout the design and implementation process, ensuring strong design, ecological authenticity, and overall beauty.

AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH

Most environmental organizations do the vital work of protecting resources—endangered lands, compromised water sources, vulnerable tribal lands. Nature Sacred’s impact resides at **the powerful intersection** of the health and well-being, equity, and environmental movements.



THE PROCESS

Each space begins with the Nature Sacred Design Process, forging a partnership between a community leader and a landscape architect to guide community members through a visionary charrette process to achieve a welcoming Sacred Place. Nature Sacred’s staff and Design Advisors equip and support this community leader—whom we call a Firesoul—to engage their community by instilling a sense of ownership that ensures successful stewardship of each space.

Guiding Principles of a Sacred Place

open

Physically open and accessible to visitors regardless of race, creed, background or beliefs — all are welcome.

nearby

Located within the neighborhood it serves — closeby.

sacred

Designed to bring respite, encourage mindful reflection, engender peace.

community-led

Built for and by the community it serves; reflective of place, story and culture.

Who Benefits from Nature Sacred?

Access to nature is often a class marker.

Nature Sacred understands the inequity in accessing nature for the most vulnerable people, especially our youth whose futures are being shaped by these issues each day.

This is why we center our work in highly stressed neighborhoods, communities, and institutional settings.

Nature Sacred engages Firesouls who serve as community catalysts and leaders at the center of the respective

community in which they volunteer. They are a trusted part of the community, positioning them for success in working with individuals and families to adopt the Nature Sacred model. They are bonded to their respective Sacred Space and to other Firesouls through the Firesoul Network, comprised of 100+ leaders. **Nature Sacred supports and invests in Firesouls through education, facilitation, trainings, promotion, and enrichment and enhancement grants.**

"A Firesoul is someone who believes in peace and everything that is an example of peace in the natural and built environment. Someone who is positive and someone who believes that giving is more important than receiving."

-Nichole Battle, Nature Sacred Board Member
and Firesoul at Thanksgiving Place



A TIME FOR SCALING: THE DEMAND FOR ACCESS TO NATURE

Over the past 25 years, Nature Sacred has created 100+ spaces in 40 distinct municipalities across the country—some have existed for more than two decades. As Nature Sacred grows, so too does the demand for our work. Nature Sacred is at a moment of inflection.

As we look to the future, Nature Sacred is proceeding with intention and hope. The organization set its new infrastructure in place to build and strengthen key programs. Nature Sacred has set a course for growth and scaling, guided by the following goals:

Model

- 📖 Codify our unique community-led model and process.
- 📖 Systematize and deepen supports to Firesouls.
- 📖 Thoughtfully expand the Nature Sacred bench supply chain.

Scale

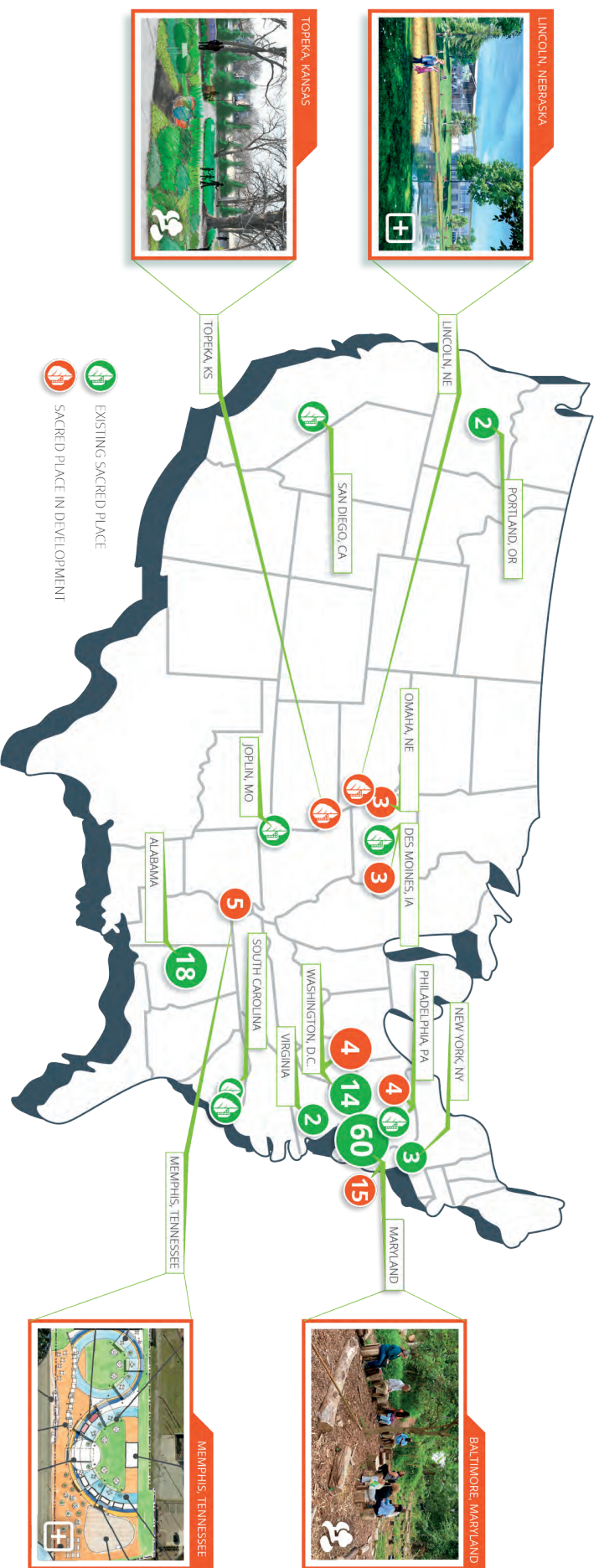
- 📖 Launch the Community Healing Initiative for underserved communities.
- 📖 Launch the Nature for Wellness Initiative focusing on healthcare and education institutions.
- 📖 Explore corporate multiplier.

Mindset

- 📖 Aggregate and disseminate research on healing power of contemplative, nearby nature.
- 📖 Create Sacred Place design process certification.
- 📖 Develop targeted outreach and education to influence Sacred Place creation.



WHERE ARE SACRED PLACES SPROUTING?



VISION & LEADERSHIP

In 2020, Nature Sacred completed a strategic planning process, resulting in a plan—both visionary and bottom line—to create a minimum of 100 additional spaces by 2025 for a more fully scaled national and global impact.

Inspired by the legacy of Kitty and Tom Stoner, and with the guidance and leadership of CEO Alden E. Stoner, Nature Sacred has developed a Board of Directors, a strong and diverse group of philanthropic, business, environmental, and civic leaders—including Firesouls—who are collectively poised to steward Nature Sacred into the next era of growth.

*Peace. Love. Health. Joy. Safety. Serenity. Prosperity.
Contentment. All are mine as I walk the Thanksgiving Place
labyrinth. I am drawn back again and again.*

Journal Entry, Thanksgiving Place



AN INVITATION

At Nature Sacred, we bring nature into urban settings—a parking lot turned into a green space, a space for respite and solace in a hospital setting, etc. We “create” nature where it does not exist, for those who do not get to experience what so many of us are fortunate to access each and every day.

Just as our green spaces are community-led, reaching our vision requires a community of support. **It takes YOU.**

We have a model. We have momentum. And with you and your generosity, we'll achieve our vision of creating 100 new Sacred Places by 2025.

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Nature Sacred