



Michelle Maison (on left) and Susan Lenz are pictured at Barrington's White House where their Barrington Area Conservation Trust offices are located.

Two Women, One Goal

A PASSIONATE NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM CONTINUES BACT'S MISSION

LAUNCHING INTO ITS 18TH YEAR, Barrington Area Conservation Trust's (BACT) board of directors and staff felt it was time for an internal change. With the departure of their executive director in late 2018 came the opportunity to restructure the organization to capitalize on the complementary strengths of two women, Michelle Nagy Maison and Susan Lenz.

Suited for the Job

A board member familiar with Michelle Nagy Maison's work in fundraising reached out to her

for help. The local businesswoman and lawyer listened, marveling at how the job description matched not only her work experience, but her heart-felt appreciation for "the peace and tranquility of our beautiful village."

Growing up in the Barrington area, but leaving to advance her education at Boston College and DePaul University Law School, Maison returned to Barrington Hills committed to preserving the community she loved, eventually serving on Barrington Hills' Planning Commission. "We cannot take for granted that our village will always look

this way," says Maison to her son as they layered up for a workday. "Without organizations like BACT acting to preserve the area, our landscape could change," she said.

As BACT's Executive Director of Development, Maison is responsible for marketing and communications, combined with fundraising accomplished through special events, major donors, foundation giving, business sponsorships, and memberships. Maison draws on her skills in tax planning and mediation to work with Lenz on drafting conservation easements.



*Michelle Nagy Maison
Executive Director of
Development*

My main role is to work with our Board of Trustees to plan and implement a comprehensive fundraising strategy in support of BACT strategic goals. I will work to achieve these goals through special events, major donor participation, foundation giving, cultivating business sponsors, and growing our membership population.

BACT's mission says it all. As lifelong residents of this exceptional area, we have a responsibility to preserve our land, restore it, and inspire our future generations to care for it, as well. I love knowing that the work with BACT will have an impact for generations to come. My hope is if my kids decide to move back to this area, that we were able to retain the rural character of the land.

I love that BACT is committed to inspiring and educating others to do conservation work. With a dedicated group of people working full-time to implement the strategic goals to further conservation efforts for all of the area—the opportunities are endless.

In the past, I have served as a Village of Barrington Hills Trustee. When I took this position, I did a lot of research. I found that many people do not have a clear picture of how much BACT contributes to our area. Through a website refresh and other social media campaigns and marketing, I would like to get a clear message put together to inspire and provide actionable items for people to get involved with conservation efforts. I would like to grow our adult volunteer population. I would love to get information out to our community about the amazing education programs that we support for the high school.



*Susan Lenz
Executive Director of
Conservation*

My role is directing land preservation initiatives and stewardship, as well as managing land programs and education. Working with local, regional, and national organizations to further conservation efforts and bring them to a local level.

Since I was a child, I always have had a love for and passion for nature and the environment. I am an eager learner, and nature is such a wonderful classroom. Plus, I am a people person.

We work with local, regional, and national partners on a variety of conservation initiatives to bring them to a local level. The greater Barrington area is special in that it still contains precious natural settings such as prairies, wetlands, oak savannas, and fens. We have preserved 520 acres, which include our nature preserves, easements, and heritage corridors. Conservation easements for homeowners are an important tool used to protect in perpetuity the

natural open spaces that set our community apart from others.

My hope is to help preserve our community's rare and exceptional open spaces for current and future generations and that with our efforts, and those of other community organizations with whom we partner, in 20 or 40 years Barrington will still have wide open spaces with natural beauty that has been preserved and restored.

A Natural Progression

As BACT's most recent Director of Community Engagement & Education, the promotion to Executive Director of Conservation was an exciting next step for Susan Lenz. Working for BACT since 2015, Lenz remains passionate about protecting rare local fens, gravel hill prairies, oak woodlands, prairies, and wetlands before more are lost.

"A vital part of this effort is educating our next generation of conservation stewards so that they will care about the environment and hopefully take a vested interest in its future," Lenz said. She is

striving to bring local organizations together to improve learning resources for students and residents.

Volunteers Take on Expanded Roles

After the organization's restructure, BACT volunteer Jennifer Lucas assumed Lenz's responsibilities coordinating volunteers, while supporting Maison with communication.

"With the growing trend of being 'green,' this is a great time for BACT to gain increased recognition and grow," Maison said. (See sidebar for volunteer details.) 

Events and Volunteer Opportunities

There are many ways to support BACT with your volunteer help or to attend events. Here are some areas to consider. For more information, visit <https://www.bactrust.org/volunteer>.

- April 22—Earth Day at Pederson Preserve
- August 31—Concert for Conservation Fundraiser
- October 6—Oaktobefest at Far Field Nature Preserve

Conservation@Home

An individual who educates, supports, and recognizes homeowners who incorporate environmentally friendly practices into their yard. The foundation of the program is to encourage installation of native plants into home landscaping.

Restoration Workdays

Volunteer for scheduled workdays. Be a Site Steward. Help as a Volunteer Coordinator at workdays.

Special Events

Assist BACT staff with special events.

Education

Assist BACT's Conservation@School Coordinator with school fieldwork experiences, summer internships, and classroom presentations for high school students.

Office Work

Assist with mailings, data input, website updates, etc.

Photographer

Cover events and nature work.

www.BACTrust.org

PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO



April Anderson is a naturalist and freelance writer who can be contacted at team.nature.ed@gmail.com.