

2024

# RETREAT & REVIEW





*WINTER  
SOLSTICE  
BONFIRE*



# FROM THE DIRECTOR



Looking back on a historic year at Allerton fills me with gratitude and joy. We have made significant strides in our efforts to improve accessibility, practice preservation through use, and expand opportunities for public education and recreation. We are anxious to continue this good work – and grow the community of Allerton users along the way.

Over the next several years, we will be focused on creating spaces and experiences for the community to come together and learn – with and from each other. Creative exploration, experiential learning, and expanding our community will stay central in all we do.

We are thankful not only for the significant financial support and attendance over the last year, but also for your unique

perspectives and stories. With your continued support, new generations will continue to find their place at Allerton. Opportunities for personal connection, environmental appreciation, and accessible recreation will allow more people to experience the positive effect Allerton has on mental and physical well-being.

Going forward, we will continue to blaze new trails (literally and figuratively) while we actively listen and engage with our friends and visitors. As we come together to commune in this special place, I hope you'll join me in being thankful to be a part of this ever-growing community.

*Derek Peterson*

DEREK PETERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**1** Robert Allerton gifted his house and grounds (+3,600 acres of farmland) to the University of Illinois in the fall of 1946, which was the most generous gift extended to the University to that date.

**2** The gazebo on the hill opposite the Mansion is on the location of the white clapboard house that Robert lived in while the Mansion was being constructed.

**6** *The Three Graces* sculpture is a one of two copies that Robert Allerton had commissioned of *Monument for the Heart of Henri II of France* by Germain Pilon. The other limestone sculpture he gifted to his aunt Reinette Lester McCrea, who donated her copy to the city of Lake Geneva.

**7** The bricks used for the construction of the Mansion were brought from Holland and were used as the ballast for the ship.

Visitor Center Coordinator  
(and History Guru)  
Sarah Putman's

# TOP 10 ALLERTON FACTS

**3** John Gregg Allerton was a licensed architect who deserves credit for designing three of the Park's most majestic gardens: the Death of the Last Centaur, the Sun Singer, and the Lost Garden.

**4** The statues called *Primitive Men* are limestone copies of a plaster sculpted by Robert Allerton's artist friend Glyn Warren Philpot, using Allerton butler Edward "Ted" Page as the model. Page was paid \$5 for his efforts.

**5** The portraits of Samuel and Robert Allerton that hang inside the Mansion were painted by painter and illustrator Ellen Emmet Rand, who counts the presidential portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt among the over 500 portraits she painted in her lifetime.

**8** The Siamese Buddhas that grace the House of the Golden Buddhas were carved from a single piece of teak wood that had to cure for two years before carving.

**9** The Sphinxes that sit on the Solarium Terrace were designed by Mansion architect John Joseph Borie III. Robert had them placed so he could look upon their faces from the Solarium, indicating that the gardens and nature are what the Sphinxes are protecting.

**10** Robert Allerton attended art school for a total of five years in Munich and then Paris. The story goes that Robert decided he wasn't good enough and burnt all his paintings before returning to the United States.





## FILLING SOME BIG SHOES

MICAH PUTMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF PARK OPERATIONS

It was a privilege working alongside our recently retired Associate Director of Park Operations Richard Burton (pictured above) for the 16 years I have been at Allerton. In his 34 years of service, Richard gained a wealth of knowledge and experience, and I was happy to learn from him and grow my own skills while observing his work. Richard created a culture of diligence, determination, and positivity that I hope to carry on as the next leader of the Facilities and Grounds department here.

Richard's diligence over the past three-plus decades has kept this Park running. He was always on top of his task list, checking boxes and getting things done. From testing the HVAC twice a year to keep our facilities cool in the summer and warm in the winter, investigating everything from leaky pipes to loose doorknobs, and managing projects while planning future improvements. As Allerton runs full steam ahead with capital improvements in the Mansion and Artisan Village, I hope to maintain Richard's diligence to see these new and exciting projects through!

Determination is an important characteristic when maintaining 123-year-old facilities that weren't designed for their current use. Richard

was always determined to get the job done and find a way through the retrofits and the constant slog of broken-down facilities. Allerton is now not only pushing through that work, but adding on new efforts: a multi-use path and fully accessible woodland trail, as well as updated facilities for The Farms: An Allerton Folk School. Determination will be key to finding the right way to manage those projects in a fiscally responsible way and developing them to meet our community's needs.

One of Richard's most prominent attributes was his positive attitude. He was always up for new projects and would get excited about improving the spaces at Allerton. If there was a change order on a project, Richard just rolled with it and would laugh about it later! This is one of the most important lessons I take from Richard: to keep a positive attitude. To look forward to the work, to see the beauty in the land, architecture, and art — and care for it like he did.

As I carry on the mantle here at Allerton Park, I hope that I can fill the big shoes left behind by Richard Burton.

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## NEW EXPERIENCES!

JORDAN ZECH, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF RETREAT CENTER & PROGRAMMING

The year 2023 was full of trying new things, growing our existing events and programs, building partnerships - and having a lot of fun along the way!

We've spent the past several years strategizing how to be more accessible to the public, with a goal of opening the Mansion more often and diversifying our offerings. In 2021, we decided 2023 would be the year that we "took back" our calendar - setting aside weekends to help us achieve that goal. Instead of booking private events in the Mansion on weekends when outdoor activities (e.g., Concert Series, Picnic with the Peonies) were going on, we blocked those dates so that attendees could extend their time at Allerton and stay overnight. Our Weekend Wind Downs include discounted lodging, cash bars, and a variety of entertainment and activities (e.g., live music, yoga, guided tours/hikes) for the public to enjoy.

Some other new experiences visitors enjoyed this past year included the inaugural year of The Farms: An Allerton Folk School (see page 15), Supper Club, and Camp Lost Garden: An Adult Summer Camp (pictured above). If you missed them, no worries - you'll see all of these again in 2024!

Our multi-day Farms Retreats kicked off last fall with the Writer's Retreat, which left participants asking for more. And we answered! Additional retreats held this winter included the Allerton Experience, an Art Retreat, a Mindfulness Retreat, and another Writer's Retreat. None of these would be possible without important partnerships. The Writer's Retreat was led by The University of Illinois' Department of English and Writers Workshop. Our Mindfulness Retreat presented by The Health and Wellness Collective has over a dozen area experts providing educational talks, treatments,



and activities that will enhance participants' health and wellness. We are excited to see these partnerships grow and create new connections.

We continue to streamline and refine our processes to get these events out to the public in the most efficient way possible. We are planning numerous projects that will allow us to continue to expand our efforts, including ongoing facility improvements and completing a feasibility study on the Artisan Village. Visitors will see The Farms begin to have an overarching influence on other areas of the Park. Our corporate clients are already asking about hosting various workshops or classes during their time at Allerton. We

are building packages and protocol to better define and showcase these offerings.

Finally, visitors can expect to see an expanded Plant Sale weekend as part of our inaugural Bluebell Festival (May 3-5), two sessions of Camp Lost Garden (June 27-30 & Oct. 17-19), expanded holiday offerings, and so much more!

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Corporate clients have begun taking advantage of The Farms: An Allerton Folk School activities. Above, participants of the Viscoplastic Flow Workshop take glass blowing lessons from Mack Glass during their four-night conference.



Authors get inspiration in the Butternut Room during the Writing Retreat, which included lectures and seminars mixed with time for writing. Additional retreats included those for Art and Mindfulness.



## GLOWING AND GROWING

LUCAS RUND, PARK SUPERVISOR

So many aspects of Allerton Park are growing and evolving – and that doesn't stop with Holiday GLOW. Every year, our Parks staff, along with our amazing group of volunteers, elevate GLOW and illuminate more of our beloved park than the previous year; this year was no exception.

We have come a long way from the first iteration of this seasonal tradition in 2016. With over a quarter of a million individual light bulbs, this year we added 2 sections to our light tunnel, connected lights and art pieces along the asphalt path toward the Mansion, and even lit our 1965 Allerton Fire Truck in the Meadow for the perfect photo op!

But what goes into GLOW? Is it really that difficult to string some lights?

Power is a huge part of our planning for GLOW. And I'm not just talking about electricity – finding the man (and woman) power to string our lights is a challenge. It takes about 540 working hours for our Parks staff to get lights set and ready to roll for GLOW. We also have an amazing group of volunteers that have collectively donated over 100 hours to get GLOW set up from October 1st - December 1st. (We can always use more help – check our website to learn more about volunteering!)

In order to safely and securely power our lights, we use ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) to not only protect the integrity of the infrastructure, but to ensure that, even in rain and snow, we can guarantee the safety of our guests. Unfortunately, that means when conditions are wet, we lose some of our GLOW! We've taken steps to prevent moisture from getting into cords and plugs with relatively simple methods: installing waterproof coverings, using dielectric grease on connections to keep moisture from getting in, and upgrading standard plug lights to newer coax cable lights that have

waterproofing plugs and extensions built in. However, no system is perfect, and we still tend to have issues when it comes to large rainstorms, limbs falling, and the occasional hungry squirrel looking to chomp through a wire.

When we see lights out, we treat it like a puzzle to solve, going through each connection and finding solutions. Our team of three takes 1-2 hours every day to ensure that the lights are up and running for you, our public, to enjoy.

Jack, Leo, and I hope that when you come to the Park for GLOW or any other event, you see the majesty that is Allerton Park and appreciate the work and care that goes into making sure you have the best experience possible while you're our guest!

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Dedicated Allerton volunteers help setup the light tunnel for Holiday GLOW.





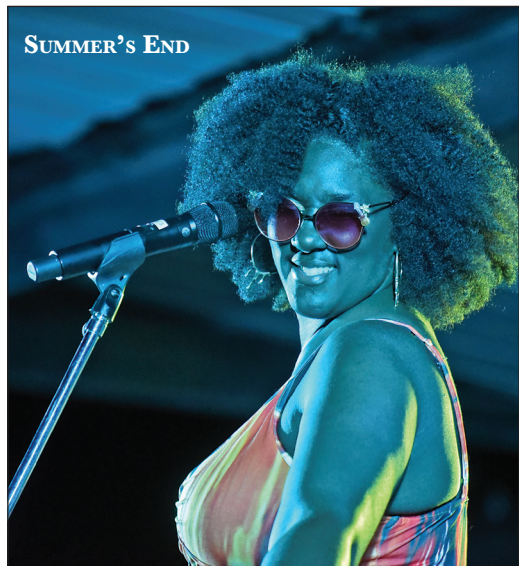
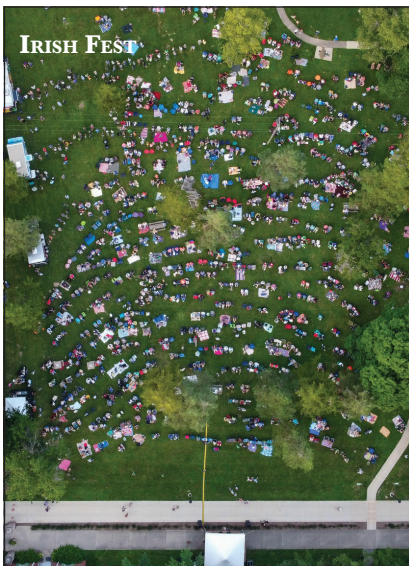
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24  
*Concert Series*

June 14 – LOVE FOR ALLERTON

July 5 – Red, Whites & the Blues

August 2 – Irish Fest

September 13 – Summer's End





## AN HONORED DESIGNATION

NATE BECCUE, NATURAL AREAS MANAGER

Saturday, April 22, 2023 marked a historic day for Allerton Park, as it achieved a remarkable milestone by being inducted into the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN). This celebration appropriately coincided with Earth Day, emphasizing the Park's commitment to nature conservation. The induction ceremony took place at the McDonald Family Trails on the south side of the Park, where OGFN staff presented a plaque to Allerton officials.

Allerton Park has been meticulously surveyed by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI), revealing 470 acres of very high and high quality forests. That makes it the largest area of high-quality forest in the Grand Prairie Natural Division, the vast plain of central and east-central Illinois formerly consisting of tallgrass prairie and now converted almost exclusively to agriculture. The dominant tree species, including oak, hickory, hackberry, maple, and sycamore, contributed to the Park's ecological richness.

Allerton Park is one of the most beautiful forests in Central Illinois and also one of the largest areas of contiguous forests. As a large contiguous forest tract, Allerton plays a significant role in supporting neotropical bird populations, whose habitats had been threatened by fragmentation in the region.

The Old-Growth Forest Network, founded in 2012 by Dr. Joan Maloof, aims to create a national network of protected, publicly accessible forests. Allerton Park became the second Illinois forest to join the network, following Beall Woods State Park in Mt. Carmel. With a mission to preserve at least one forest in every U.S. county capable of sustaining a forest, OGFN connects people with nature and advocates for the ecological and human wellness benefits of old-growth forests.

Nick Sanchez, Network Manager for OGFN, expressed excitement about Allerton Park joining the network on Earth Day, stating, "Whether you were seeking an immersive time in nature for spiritual renewal or answers to questions that have informed more than 300 research papers, this forest provided outsized benefits that extended far beyond its boundaries."

The induction ceremony was followed by a hike, inviting the public to experience the breathtaking natural features of Allerton Park.

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**VISITOR CENTER OPENS!** The McCraw Family Visitor Center opened on March 20, 2023 thanks to support from the McCraw family. Pictured above with Executive Director Derek Peterson (left) and Associate Director of Advancement Bridget Frerichs (right) are brothers Tom, David, John and Jim McCraw. Below, Jessica McCraw poses with a fu dog that is on permanent display at the Visitor Center, which is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Originally Robert Allerton's garden shed, the building now serves as a welcoming and informative space for visitors and houses a Gift Shop (open Wednesdays–Sundays).





## AN EXCITING START

ZAK JONES, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

It was an honor to join the Allerton team in October – and what an exciting few months it has been! From bird watching hikes and bonfires to holiday celebrations and concerts, it's been a blur of wonderful activities connecting with so many incredible people. It is fantastic to see the Allerton community grow and come together in new ways as our staff offers more experiences in the Mansion, surrounding facilities, and natural areas.

Being from central Illinois, the beautiful outdoors of Allerton has always been a sublime getaway just a short drive from home. During my first visit on a grade school field trip, I recall thinking we had journeyed into a fairy tale. That sense of awe continues for me – and countless others – with each adventure. I've enjoyed hearing unique stories from visitors who have been making memories here for many years; it truly shows the importance of the Allerton legacy. With the construction of the first fully accessible trail in the Wandering Woods underway, I look

forward to people being able to share new kinds experiences here as well.

It has been thrilling to learn more about plans to expand our creative programs, continue growing the Artisan Village, and improve accessibility. My role at Allerton is to raise money to support the essential efforts of my colleagues who work to sustain and improve this special place. The community who helps support Allerton is amazing, and it brings me great pride to be able to connect donors with projects that are meaningful to them and impactful to Allerton. It is an exciting road ahead, and I would love to share more about our future projects and how you can get involved. The collective passion that the Allerton team and community share is inspiring and gives me great hope and excitement for the future!

**YOU CAN REACH ZAK AT:**

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**GREENHOUSE CAFÉ**

Offering a fresh selection of sandwiches, salads, and homebaked goods to fuel Allerton adventures. Open seasonally, April-November.



# IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EXPAND

*Poets, playwrights, photographers and our first Naturalist-In-Residence all used Allerton as inspiration for their various passions, thanks to funding from Joan and Peter Hood and Len Lewicki.*



## Michael Baker

Michael Baker was the first Naturalist to be a part of the In-Residence program. He led foraging hikes, showing participants the wide variety of edible plants that can be found near our homes and used in tasty recipes.



## Tina Jenkins Bell

Tina Jenkins Bell, a published author, freelance journalist and literary activist, spent three weeks doing research for her works, which includes an upcoming collection of short stories, *American Ghetto*.



## Sandra Jackson-Opoku

Author Sandra Jackson-Opoku, a native of Chicago, spent her time at the Park working on a historical time travel novel, *Days of DuSable*, which offers a speculative look at Jean Baptiste DuSable.



## Rozarii Lynch

Photographer Rozarii Lynch traveled from Seattle, Washington to spend time at Allerton taking photos, researching a future project and inspiring youth at a photography workshop.

## Kelsey Zlevor

Kelsey Zlevor combined her urban planning and mental health expertise to draft a Mental Landscapes map overlay which highlights spots at Allerton that can help elevate mental well being.





## MANSION WORK ONGOING

CHRISTINA CALCAGNO, RETREAT CENTER MANAGER

**T**here have been several transformational changes to the Mansion over the last year, including renovations of the Solarium, John Gregg's former room (#4) and the Library. These critical updates allow us to showcase the unique history of the Mansion and improve the overall guest experience.

The upgrades to the Solarium, funded by Debra and David Rathje (pictured above), have transformed that space into a "hub" for wedding receptions, dinner parties, and our own Allerton-hosted events. In the past, the Solarium did not have any furniture that solely "lived" in that space. The new sunroom-esque furniture gives a new sense of purpose to this beautiful room, and allows guests to relax while enjoying views of the koi pond or good conversation with friends. In addition, the glamorous new bar allows our staff to better host events and certainly makes for a more picturesque background for any good time!

John Gregg Allerton's original bedroom has been renovated in memory of his niece, Jane Gregg Schowalter. Memorial gifts from Jane's friends and a donation from her husband Bill and children Katherine, David, and Mary funded a full upgrade to the room, including more historically accurate furniture, window coverings, and décor, a complete bathroom remodel, and fresh robin egg blue paint. This beloved guest space has quickly become a "fan favorite" and hotel guests have enjoyed seeing the space get a well-deserved face lift. You can see the room and celebrate this generous gift at a dedication event on April 20 (find details on our website)!

A donation from Susan and Steven Zumdahl has provided (ongoing) updates to our largest meeting space, the Library. The already completed audiovisual and lighting upgrades have been a hit with conference guests, who



now have the ability to dim lights during presentations or spotlight a keynote speaker. While we wait in anticipation for the arrival of the new furniture and window treatments, everyone agrees that the new dark green paint adds a welcome sense of warmth to the room and highlights the books on the shelves wonderfully.

Our sincere thanks goes out to these donors, as well as our volunteer designer, Anne Carlson, who has helped create the vision for the Allerton Mansion and breathe new life into Robert Allerton's former home.

I am hopeful that Park visitors, wedding guests, and conference participants all get the chance to enjoy the effort staff, donors, and volunteers are putting into the preservation of the Mansion. Though, our work is never done! This Spring we will begin renovating two additional guestrooms (#6 and #8), with funding from the University of Illinois Chancellor's Office.

As I like to tell people - there is always something going on at Allerton! Hope you can visit soon.

***YOU CAN REACH CHRISTINA AT:***  
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Updates to John Gregg's former room (above) included the addition of two of his original watercolors. The renovation of Robert Allerton's original Music Room turned Library (below) will continue this spring with updated furniture and window treatments.





## FOLK SCHOOL LAUNCHED

OLIVIA BUNTING, SENIOR PROGRAM COORDINATOR

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to learning new things and acquiring new skills to enrich my own life and the lives of those important to me. This was part of the reason I wanted to become a teacher. After spending a few years in the classroom, I quickly realized my place was not in formal education, but I knew I still wanted to help others learn.

Researching folk schools and folk education in preparation for The Farms: An Allerton Folk School has given me a new outlook on education and learning. Folk schools and folk education is not intended to be done in a classroom with homework, tests, and essays. Alternatively, it allows students to learn hands-on skills that they can use for the betterment of their own lives and their families, as well as the lives of their community. Folk schools were first established in Denmark in the mid-1800s to provide poor, rural communities with an education beyond what was considered traditional. Philosopher and educator Nikolai Grundtvig came up with the folk education ideology to bring dignity to his fellow countrymen, especially farmers, to ensure their active participation in society. Through folk education, Denmark progressed into the democratic society they are today.

While planning The Farms, we took these foundational ideas of folk education and combined them with what we have already been doing at Allerton for years. In addition to keeping the traditions of folk schools in



The logo for the folk school calls back to the original logo designed by John Gregg for the Allerton property, which he and Robert Allerton referred to as “The Farms.”

mind, we wanted to expand on what we already offered (e.g., workshops, hikes, tours, and other public programs), while adhering to our mission of engaging our community in nature and the arts.

After announcing plans for The Farms last February (with the help of an article in the *Chicago Tribune!*), we launched the first folk school in Illinois in September, offering a wide array of classes in art, outdoor education, science, storytelling, and wellness. While continuing existing Allerton programs, we offered a total of 36 courses, including new experiences like learning improv, musical instruments, fiber arts, and bookbinding. The semester-like format includes a more

consistent, pre-scheduled list of courses to help participants evaluate their options and plan ahead. Through student surveys, we received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback, along with helpful suggestions on how we can improve. Because folk schools focus so much on community, we want to make sure we listen to our community members and continue to provide courses they want and enjoy.

I am eager to see what the future holds for The Farms. We have exciting things planned for the coming year and beyond. I look forward to continuing to learn about folk education and our community, and providing more engaging and hands-on learning experiences.

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# SCENES FROM THE FARMS



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Folk school participants try their hand at: playing dulcimer, block printing, weaving, camping, beginner guitar and bookbinding.

## OLIVE SPANNAUS EDUCATION SERIES

We were proud to host the Olive Spannaus Education Series (OSES) throughout 2023. The Series was made possible through a gift from Fred Spannaus and Connie Requarth in memory of Fred's mother, Olive Wise Spannaus (1916-2018). The goal of OSES was to highlight underrepresented communities in art, nature, and history, through sessions led by members of those communities.

The educational series featured a variety of presenters throughout its four sessions, including: the lesser-known relationships of Robert Allerton (Maureen Holtz & Nicholas Syrett), accounts of a former queer senior pastor at the United Church of Christ (Eileen Gebbie), an overview of intersectional environmentalism (Leah Thomas), and a talk entitled "Reparations: Universalism and the African American Struggle for Autonomy" (Dr. Sundiata Cha-Jua).

Fred Spannaus, himself a frequent visitor to Allerton since moving to Decatur in 1970, noted that while Olive was never able to visit the Park, she would be proud of the series that bears her name.

"She would have loved Allerton, and she



Olive Wise Spannaus was a social justice worker, faithful Lutheran, feminist and nature lover.

loved education, especially with a focus on feminism," he said. "She loved nature and lived her life joyfully."

The Series will continue in 2024 – stay tuned!



Leah Thomas (above) and Dr. Sundiata Cha-Jua (right) were two presenters in the series, which aimed to highlight underrepresented communities in art, nature and history.







**WANDERING WOODS PATH UNDERWAY:** Last fall, construction began on the Wandering Woods path, which will be the first fully accessible woodland trail at Allerton. Phase One is expected to be complete by this summer, with future phases consisting of natural play areas for children and families.

## Current Priorities for the 2030 Strategic Plan

<b>EXPAND OUR IMPACT</b>	<b>PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE NATURAL WORLD</b>	<b>CAPITALIZE ON CURRENT FACILITIES</b>	<b>CULTIVATE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Increase number and variety of programs and events</li> <li>» Diversify marketing outlets and content</li> <li>» Expand staff training and professional development</li> <li>» Refine internal operations and processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Install Wandering Woods paved accessible trail</li> <li>» Implement Phase 1 of Old Timber Multi-Use Trail</li> <li>» Continue invasive species management</li> <li>» Increase public environmental education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Complete feasibility study for Artisan Village facilities and Mansion Lobby</li> <li>» Continue to restore Mansion rooms</li> <li>» Improve accessibility of Mansion exterior and garden paths</li> <li>» Begin guesthouse room restorations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Secure endowments to fund The Farms: An Allerton Folk School</li> <li>» Host Visiting Residents to create, research, and teach onsite</li> <li>» Integrate The Farms programming with Retreat Center revenue generating activities</li> </ul>

# NEW FACES

SEVERAL STAFF MEMBERS WERE ADDED TO THE ALLERTON TEAM IN 2023!



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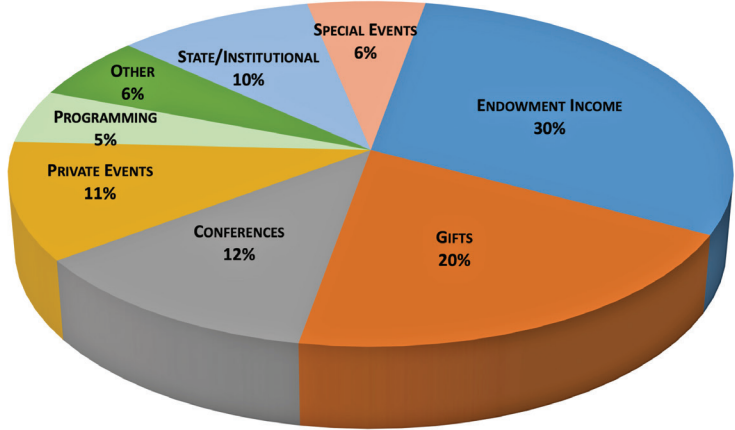
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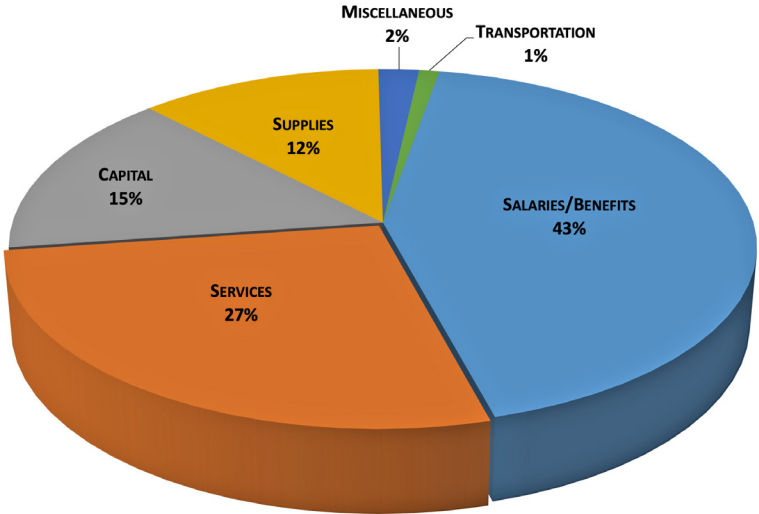
# A SNAPSHOT OF ALLERTON'S FY23\* FINANCIALS

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS, CONTACT  
TOSHUA AT [TMYORK@ILLINOIS.EDU](mailto:TMYORK@ILLINOIS.EDU).

FY23 REVENUE BREAKDOWN



FY23 EXPENSE BREAKDOWN



\*FY23: JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023



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