

ALSA Honorary Membership Nomination Narrative

Nominee: Kitty Stoner
3065 Rundelac Rd. Annapolis 21403, 410-279-5225 (m) ellsworthstoner@gmail.com

Nominator: Jay Graham. FASLA
Senior Principal, Moody Graham

If, during our career, we have one client rise to the level of patron, we are fortunate. Kitty and Tom Stoner retained me to design their gardens over two decades ago. During the course of our close collaborations, they asked me to join their foundation, the TKF Foundation, as design advisor. It was then that I realized: this couple not only has a deep appreciation for design—they have hatched a beautiful concept with deep potential.

Hailing from rural Iowa where Tom had co-founded two successful radio broadcasting businesses, the couple moved to the D.C. area in the early 1980s. They were struck by the dearth of nature in cities—communities where stress, crime and mental illness was on the rise. Communities that were continuing to swell in population. Communities struggling to find peace and unity.

The Stoners, as lifelong nature enthusiasts, inherently understand the powers nature holds to heal, unify and strengthen people. To Kitty and Tom, nature is not a destination or a luxury afforded only to some, rather, it is essential to the wellbeing of all people, as it is a human right. In their new urban home, they realized too many individuals and communities were denied this right—with increasingly dire results.

The idea crystalized those thirty years ago: Kitty and Tom imagined a series of small, meaningful green spaces, embedded right into the built environments of the communities they serve—communities who need nature most. Accessible micro-parks designed intentionally, tucked into city corners or vacant lots, and customized to bring nature to their unique populations in meaningful, welcoming ways.

The Stoners knew that to make this work, they needed to offer a framework that communities could easily adopt to reflect their cultures, versus a 'top-down' kind of approach. Moreover, the design would need to foster mindful reflection: to serve as a kind of healing poultice to help people renew and find balance amidst the stressors of modern life. Finally, these spaces needed to be open to all—no barriers to entry or gates—and needed to be nearby, within walking distance of the community served.

To do this effectively, Kitty and Tom collaborated with some of the world's preeminent landscape architects and researchers to engineer an evidence-based model. This approach leverages four core design elements that supports their guiding principles, and a process that fosters community input and collaboration all along the way. They called these kinds of accessible, nearby micro-parks "Open Spaces, Sacred Places"; what we today call Sacred Places.

The first Sacred Place was created in the mid-1990's, then came a few more. Kitty and Tom were awed by the impact these small Sacred Places were having. Countless stories surfaced via the free, waterproof journals offered at each site—open letters of gratitude and healing. Communities coalescing. People reconnecting with themselves and each other. Strengthening. Finding pride and hope.

Over the course of the next two decades, TKF partnered with communities to create over 130 Sacred Places in all kinds of environments—all across the country. Hospitals, prisons, churches, cities—places where healing was needed. And today, we're seeing Sacred Places come to life in some of the most surprising and creative ways.

Tens of thousands of journal entries tell us that this model is working—first-hand accounts of joy, grief and everyday thoughts—penned by park visitors of all kinds, from all over the country, finding solace and respite in the middle of some of the most stressful environments.

Inspired by the journal testimonials, Kitty and Tom set out in 2011 to better measure the impact the Sacred Places were having on individuals and communities in the name of advocacy. They embarked upon a robust six-year research initiative—the Nature Sacred Awards Program. Kitty and Tom summoned leading researchers and landscape architects to study the impacts nature can have on populations hard-hit by trauma, stress, disaster recovery and PTSD. Sacred Places were built in cities and communities devastated by an EF5 tornado, recovering from decades of crime and blight, struggling to rebuild after a hurricane—and in a hospital near the ICU, on the campus of a military hospital. The research is continuing to come in—and we look forward to sharing the results. While the research was underway, TKF engaged FrameWorks Institute to gauge the attitudes of the public toward urban nature. This engagement has led to ASLA being introduced to FrameWorks Institute.

Under Kitty and Tom's direction, TKF has now shifted its focus to promulgate this concept to new communities via Nature Sacred—an organization established to help inspire, inform and guide community activists, urban planners and landscape architects in the creation of these sacred, urban micro-parks through robust resources, tools, advisors and much more.

While it is likely not usual to submit a nomination for a couple, Kitty and Tom truly operate as one entity; as two separate halves of one brain. Deep thinkers, the Stoners possess a pragmatic kind of optimism—one steeped in design, evidence and promise. They embody the kind of hope and vision that is so ardently needed today—and beyond.



Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

January 30, 2019

ASLA Honorary Membership Nominations
636 Eye Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Selection Committee,

It is a privilege for me to write in support of Kitty and Tom Stoner's Honorary ASLA Membership. I came to know the couple, their foundation, and their personal values when my firm, Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects (NBW), became involved with work on Brooklyn's Naval Cemetery Landscape in 2010 - a project made possible through their generous philanthropy. In the years since, I had been continually impressed by their dedication and capability to effect change in the civic realm, and feel strongly that they both embody the spirit and qualities of an ideal Honorary ASLA Member.

Inspired by their own experience with a small urban park, Kitty and Tom have endeavored to promote the tranquility and health benefits in a broad range of public spaces and communities ever since. Their foundation, Nature Sacred, embodies idealized principals and achievable goals that would otherwise go unrealized without strong leadership and action-based strategies. They provide exactly this - concrete goals that can be tailored to each project responding to the context of place, community, and history. The process they promote ensures a positive reception and sustained momentum of their projects from inception and long after implementation.

I directly experienced the application of their philosophy throughout my firm's work with the Naval Cemetery Landscape, a project which called for a culturally sensitive interpretation of a former burial ground in the heart of Brooklyn. Kitty and Tom's approach to creating a nature-connected public space within the specific context of the site and the surrounding community aligned synergistically with my firm's mission, thus the collaboration resulted in a highly successful design process and final product. Today, the Naval Cemetery Landscape reconnects visitors to the stories of the site, using a native wildflower meadow to attract pollinator species and re-framing the site as a celebration of life. It has to date received wide press coverage, a number of regional ASLA awards, and most importantly it is well-used and well-loved by the Brooklyn community.

Kitty and Tom promote wide scale change through a network of successful park spaces while allowing for consideration of subtleties in the design process for each individual site. Their philosophy as applied to each individual park space has been and continues to be a tremendous contribution to the field of landscape architecture.

I can offer no higher endorsement for their ASLA Honorary Membership nomination. If I can be of further assistance in the selection process, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Thomas L. Woltz, FASLA, CLARB
Principal, Nelson Byrd Woltz, PLLC



ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

January 29, 2019

Re: ASLA Honorary Membership Nomination for Kitty and Tom Stoner

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I am writing to share my support of Kitty and Tom Stoner's nomination for ASLA Honorary Membership.

At The Nature Conservancy, we are working to help cities integrate nature in ways that promote resilience and cultivate sustainable, liveable communities. Yet, how can we address the health of our cities without also addressing the needs of the people who live and work in them? Can we afford to look at one without the other? Are the two not intrinsic?

These are the questions that Kitty and Tom Stoner have prompted me to think on more deeply — in ways that perhaps I had not considered before. In ways that have influenced the trajectory of my thinking on urban strategies.

Through the simple act of reconnecting people with nature, even in small doses, we can help improve individuals' health and wellbeing, as research continues to show us. Kitty and Tom have demonstrated how integrating small, thoughtful green spaces, or Sacred Places, accessible to any resident or passer-by, brings us a chance to touch them. We have a chance to extend a welcome; offer a safe place to pause, regroup and reflect; and lend a reminder that they, too, matter. That they, too, are part of a community—a larger system. That they, too, play a role.

The Stoners have shown us that it doesn't require a lot of space, or large sums of money to realize these goals. We see that modest spaces, born through a thoughtful, community-led process and guided by science, are truly elegant by nature. It is through this model that we see the fingerprints of each community on every space—we see reflection of culture, heritage and pride in place. And it is these fingerprints that make all the difference. They spark engagement, participation and a sense of agency. They inspire community cohesion, a willingness to come together and even activism. It is here that we can reserve hope for our future.

I wholeheartedly support the nomination of Kitty and Tom Stoner for an ALSA Honorary Membership. They continue to make an indelible mark on the communities they serve—and have influenced the ways we can re-imagine healthier, more resilient cities of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pascal Mittermaier".

Pascal Mittermaier
Global Managing Director, Cities
The Nature Conservancy

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January 30, 2019

ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I'm writing to express my support of the nomination of Kitty and Tom Stoner for Honorary Membership in ASLA. I've known them for over 15 years and can attest to the indelible mark the couple has made—and continues to make—on the field of healing gardens and other landscapes for health.

If you've ever entered one of their green spaces, you would know it. While they can be easy to miss, tucked into small urban corners or hospital campuses, each space exudes a unique kind of grace. A simple, modest elegance that only intentional design can bring. Right down to their hallmark bench, placed at every Sacred Place, made from reclaimed wood with a special compartment to house a waterproof journal, open to anyone to share their thoughts.

This is by no mistake. Kitty and Tom have heralded the value of evidence-based design since they founded TKF some thirty years ago. By collaborating with premier researchers, such as Roger Ulrich and Kathleen Wolf; leading landscape architects and designers; and members of the community, the Stoners' approach fuses research and landscape design in ways that help people nourish their minds, spirits and bodies. This, combined with their community-led process, results in authentic outcomes that celebrate community character and place in significant ways.

In thinking of the body of work that Kitty and Tom offer us, it is this notion of grace that is most striking to me. As two people committed to helping improve public health; as art collectors, nature enthusiasts and forerunners to a powerful urban green space movement that is gaining momentum; the Stoners could easily boast. But you will never find them doing so. They embody a distinctive humility, a modest charm that is just as approachable and welcoming as their Sacred Places. And, what's more, after an encounter with either, you leave feeling just a little more inspired, enriched and grateful.

Imagine a world with more humility. More nature. And more art. It would be an even better place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Naomi Sachs', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Naomi Sachs
Naomi Sachs, PhD, ASLA, EDAC
Postdoctoral Associate at Cornell University - Department of Design and Environmental Analysis

January 30, 2019

American Society of Landscape Architects
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: Kitty and Tom Stoner Nomination for ASLA Honorary Membership

To: ASLA Executive Committee and Board of Trustees

I am writing to extend my enthusiastic support for the nomination of Kitty and Tom Stoner for honorary membership in the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA).

As co-founders of the TKF Foundation, Kitty and Tom Stoner have been visionary changemakers whose signature approach to the creation of Sacred Places, a special kind of urban landscape, has transformed myriad lives in over 130 communities. Guided by the firm belief that nature should be accessible to *all* people, regardless of situation or background, the Stoners have pioneered an effective formula for reconnecting people with nature in ways that combat stress and invite reflection. The Sacred Places that Kitty and Tom have made possible through their leadership and philanthropy are small, nearby gardens that offer beauty, hope and pride in places where it perhaps previously did not exist—prison grounds, distressed neighborhoods, hospitals, and low-income housing developments, for example.

I had the privilege of working closely with the Stoners over a period of several years to envision a national research initiative—an effort to scientifically measure the impact Sacred Places have on individuals and communities hard-hit by stress and trauma. Six design-build and research projects resulted from this work, including: a healing garden at the Walter Reed Military Medical Center for returning vets struggling with PTSD and brain trauma; a memorial garden in Joplin, MO for a community working to recover after being devastated by an EF5 tornado; a therapeutic garden at the Legacy Emanuel Medical Center outside of the ICU (that was just awarded Platinum in the Center for Health Design's Evidence-Based Design Touchstone Awards); a community garden in Queens, NY, created in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy—to name a few. Research results are still coming in, but they promise to illuminate and advance the value of these transformative green places.

At the center of the Stoner's practice is a set of design principles and a proven community engagement model that results in the creation of greenspaces that are respectful of and enriched by the needs, culture, and experiences of the places' intended users. Tucked in city corners, springing to life from vacant lots, interwoven into institutional campuses—Kitty and Tom Stoner's Sacred Place concept has been adopted and adapted by diverse communities in creative, meaningful ways. Their vision and legacy offer a standing invitation to pause and reflect in nature with the sure knowledge that hope and renewal will flow. I strongly endorse the Stoner's induction as honorary ASLA members.

Sincerely,



Beth Tuttle
President & Chief Executive Officer
American Horticultural Society



ASLA
636 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: ASLA Honorary Membership Nomination for Kitty and Tom Stoner

January 29, 2019

Dear Executive Committee and Board of Trustees,

I offer my full support for the nomination of Kitty and Tom Stoner for Honorary Membership in ASLA. It has been my extreme pleasure to know them for the past 17 years, both professionally and personally.

Kitty and Tom inherently embrace humanistic design. They devised a process for the creation of an urban green space wherein the community helps guide and inform the outcome, alongside the landscape architect. Through the TKF process, a community lead, called a Firesoul, is selected, who serves as the community conduit during the planning and design phases; helping to inspire residents to participate, lend input and attend charrette meetings. This lead works in tandem with designers, ensuring that the space is authentic, intentional and meaningful to community—and works to best serve their unique needs. This person also ensures that the landscape design remains intact throughout the process; safeguarding the integrity of the design set forth.

The outcomes are powerful. Over the years, we've revitalized vacant lots in some of the most distressed neighborhoods in Baltimore, converting them into vibrant healing gardens; places for gatherings and sources of pride. We've infused gardens in low-income senior housing—working to transform the campus and lives of the residents in positive, lasting ways.

Kitty and Tom's vision and commitment are inspiring—and we look forward to seeing more Sacred Places spring to life in new pockets across the country.

Sincerely,

Joan Floura, PLA, LEED AP, DBIA
Principal
Floura Teeter