

VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 1, 2021

Cold-Stunned Florida Turtle Re-Encountered in Tortuguero, Costa Rica 10 Years Later



Left: Cold-stunned turtles recover at the Barrier Island Center in 2010. Right: A green turtle nests at Tortuguero, Costa Rica. (Photo by Ralph Pace.)

In January 2010, Florida experienced record cold temperatures that caused an estimated 3,000 sea turtles, mostly endangered juvenile green sea turtles, to become cold-stunned along its shores. As water temperatures drop extremely low in the winter, cold-blooded sea turtles that are caught off-guard or for whatever reason do not migrate to warmer waters can be rendered near-catatonic, leaving them unable to swim or even surface for air. In this cold-stunned state, turtles are susceptible to pneumonia or other illnesses; they can be struck

by watercraft as they float at the surface; or they can even drown if they are not rescued in time. Usually, the turtles simply need to be removed from the frigid water and kept safe in holding pens where they can warm up. Once coastal water temperatures begin to rise, the turtles usually can be safely returned to the wild without the need for any other care.

Response to the 2010 cold-stun event was a collaborative effort led by state and federal resource agencies, with support from STC, coastal county governments

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Inside: STC Policy Coordinator Gary Appelson Honored with Carr Lifetime Achievement Award



Adopted Turtles Return to Tortuguero

... from cover


and numerous other private organizations. To care for cold-stunned turtles recovered near the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, STC worked with our Brevard County partners to house and care for nearly 100 affected turtles at the Barrier Island Center. STC staff members also helped care for over 1,000 cold-stunned turtles that were housed at a makeshift triage center set up at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in Titusville, Florida.

One of the turtles receiving treatment at the Merritt Island facility was a juvenile green turtle that had been found floating in the Banana River in Brevard County. After receiving some fluids and “TLC” from staff, it was given a metal flipper tag and an inner PIT tag, or microchip, before being released back to the water on January 15, 2010. Turtles are given these tags as a way to identify them should they ever be encountered again. Every tag number/letter combination is unique to each specific turtle.

Fast forward to the 2020 green turtle nesting season in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, where STC conducts the world’s longest-continuous sea turtle research and protection program. While monitoring nesting activity on the evening of August 13, 2020, STC researchers encountered one very special green turtle laying her eggs. It is STC protocol to collect biometric data from turtles encounter on the beach, once it is safe to work with the turtle without disturbing her nesting routine. The data collection process includes taking various shell measurements, recording any existing flipper tag numbers, applying new tags if the animal has not yet been tagged and using a scanning device to check for any PIT (microchip) tags beneath the skin. This particular turtle had no metal flipper tags at the time, but she did already have a PIT tag (#4B66371A5A), which was not applied by STC.

Upon making this discovery, STC reached out to the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research (ACCSTR) at the University of Florida to ask if they had any information about the PIT tag and where the animal might have been tagged. ACCSTR maintains a global database of turtle tagging projects and helps connect researchers who encounter each other’s tagged animals.

Much to our surprise, it turns out this adult green turtle spotted nesting in Tortuguero was one of the juvenile turtles tagged in Florida 10 years ago at the very facility where STC staff had been helping with the cold-stun event. She was still a juvenile back in 2010 (measuring 70.9 cm in shell length). When spotted last summer in Tortuguero she measured 101.7 cm, which means she had reached adulthood and grew more than 30 cm since the last time she was seen a decade ago.

The spotting of this turtle in Costa Rica confirms a number of important conservation lessons. First, that many of the juvenile green turtles STC and others are working so hard to protect in places like Florida and Bermuda often originate from the nesting colony we have been monitoring and protecting for over 60 years in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. The story also reminds us why it is so important to recover, treat and release back into the wild every sick or injured turtle we can, because they can survive, rejoin the wild population and one day return to nest at the beach where they were born. 

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, **Velador** translates as “one who stands vigil” —referring to turtle hunters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. STC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the world STC’s researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors. The **Velador** is published for Members and supporters of the nonprofit **Sea Turtle Conservancy**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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Archie Carr III, Ph.D., Elected STC Board Chairman

Archie “Chuck” Carr, III, the first-born son of STC’s founding scientific director, Dr. Archie Carr, was recently elected Chairman of the STC Board of Directors. Like his father, Chuck had a long and impactful career in conservation. Now retired, Chuck was a senior conservationist who spent decades coordinating Central America programs for the Wildlife Conservation Society, where he worked for nearly 30 years. Chuck was instrumental in establishing the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary in Belize as well as the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. He also spent much of his young life traveling around with his father, and spent many summers helping with the turtle project in Tortuguero, Costa Rica.

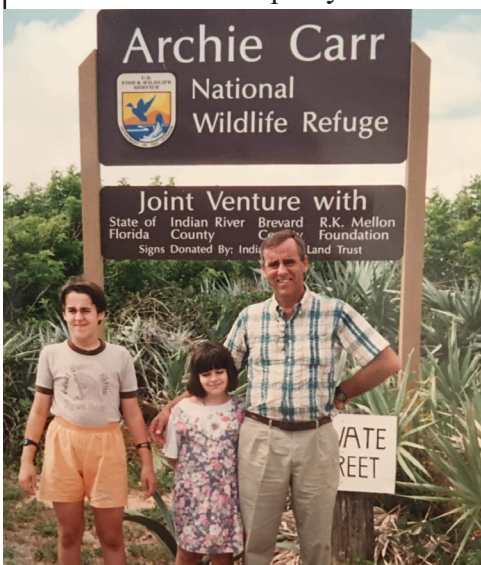


STC Board Chairman Archie “Chuck” Carr III and STC Executive Director David Godfrey.

Chuck has been equally instrumental during his decades of service as a member of STC’s Board of Directors. When asked about one of his favorite memories with STC, Chuck says that it was the satisfaction he felt upon bringing current STC Executive Director David Godfrey’s name to the Board when STC was looking for a new Executive Director, way back in 1997.

“STC was desperate for good leadership at the Executive Director level. Dave worked for my mother (Marjorie Carr) over at Florida Defenders of the Environment,” said Carr. “I became aware that, although trained in communications, he was extremely competent in various avenues of conservation, and, importantly, had become familiar with the challenges of running and funding an NGO. I was right! The Board vetted Dave, and hired him! The rest is history.”

STC is honored to carry on the legacy of Archie Carr’s name. The family’s association with the organization is forever linked by our history and plays a pivotal role in our future success. Please join us in congratulating Chuck on his appointment as STC Board Chairman! 🐢



Chuck Carr at the dedication of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge with his children Jonathan and Jenny.

Lighting Update

Funding Available for Turtle Friendly Lighting on Ft. Lauderdale Beach Properties

STC is excited to announce that we are seeking beachfront properties along Ft. Lauderdale Beach to participate in our new lighting retrofit program. In August 2020, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation awarded STC a two-year grant to retrofit select properties within the city’s 6.6-mile stretch of coastline. Through this grant, STC is able to cover most of the costs for fixtures and bulbs that are visible

from the beach, helping to alleviate some of the financial burden placed on beachfront properties to be in compliance with their local ordinance. While seemingly a small target area, the beaches along Ft. Lauderdale annually host more than 1,000 sea turtle nests and have the highest cumulative number of hatchlings impacted by artificial lights anywhere in Florida and the United States. Because nesting females generally return to the same beaches they hatched on to lay their own nests, preservation of these historic nesting sites is even more important for these threatened species. During this grant, STC will partner with coastal property owners to retrofit their existing lights using the three principles of sea turtle friendly

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Lighting Update continued...

lighting: shielding fixtures, using long wavelength amber LED bulbs, and lowering fixture mounting heights. Once a property owner contacts STC with interest in retrofitting, the lighting team conducts a nighttime and daytime evaluation on the property to measure the amount of light emitted, takes “before” pictures of the property, and records how many fixtures and bulbs need to be replaced. STC then designs a personalized lighting plan for that property, receives quotes from lighting distributors, and assembles a contract for the property owner to sign. After the contract is executed, STC provides 70 percent of the funding for the fixtures and bulbs upfront. After the lights have been installed, STC completes a final evaluation and receives a final report from the property owner or representative. STC then sends the remaining 30 percent of the grant to the property owner.

Using this methodology, STC has retrofitted more than 230 beachfront properties throughout Florida with turtle friendly lighting in the past decade

and documented decreases in disorientation rates in front of these retrofitted properties. After retrofitting, property owners meet and often exceed what their local lighting ordinance requires, report decreases in their utility bills, and enjoy the attractiveness of the property. Poorly managed beachfront lighting is one of the deadliest threats to Florida’s federally-protected sea turtles. STC hopes that if a number of Ft. Lauderdale’s prominent beachfront resorts and businesses will take advantage of this program, their neighbors will emulate them and help to create a stretch of restored nesting habitat.

If you live on Ft. Lauderdale Beach or know someone who would be interested in this program, contact Lighting Project Manager Rachel Tighe (rachel@conserveturtles.org) to learn more. For more information on STC’s lighting program and to see before and after retrofit pictures, visit conserveturtles.org/stc-beachfront-lighting-program.

STC Staff Spotlight

Retiring STC Policy Coordinator, Gary Appelson, Honored with Archie Carr Lifetime Achievement Award

Sea Turtle Conservancy’s (STC) longtime Policy Coordinator Gary Appelson retired this year after over 20 years of dedicated service on behalf of Florida’s sea turtles and their habitats. In honor of his long career and lasting impact on sea turtle conservation, STC’s Executive Director David Godfrey and Board Chairman Archie Carr III presented Gary with the Archie Carr Lifetime Achievement Award in March. During an award ceremony at the STC offices, Godfrey said, “I am immensely proud



STC Executive Director David Godfrey presents a surprised Gary Appelson with the Archie Carr Lifetime Achievement Award.

to present the Archie Carr Lifetime Achievement Award to Gary Appelson. STC established the Carr Award to recognize special individuals who, like Dr. Carr, had dedicated a significant part of their lives to the study and conservation of sea turtles. During Gary’s over two-decades of policy work with STC, he directly improved the survival outlook for sea turtles and made a lasting impact on the health of Florida’s globally-important nesting beaches. Gary has been a true champion for sea turtles.”

Over his long career with STC, Gary became a leading expert on coastal management policy. His efforts helped ensure sea turtle protection laws were not weakened; he formed valuable relationships with lawmakers, researchers and industry professionals; and spearheaded new policies

that will protect sea turtles well into the future.

His legacy as a tireless sea turtle advocate in

Florida was not written in stone, however, especially when one considers his upbringing in Athens, Georgia, where Gary said his parents paid no attention to the environment. Consequently, during his early life he had very little contact with or appreciation for nature.

That changed after Gary started college at the University of Florida (UF), where he majored in Political Science with a specialty in Environmental Policy. He awoke to the natural world and all the unsustainable things that were happening to it. Old growth redwood trees were being felled by logging companies, rivers were catching fire, and wildlife was going extinct all over the world. Gary began filling his mind with the words of nature writers like Rachel Carson, John McPhee and Bill McKibben, while consuming newsletters from Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. He started hiking in the Appalachian Mountains. He joined the anti-nuclear movement, formed his own organization and began speaking out against chemical companies, nuclear energy and the plywood industry. And just like that, an environmental advocate was born.

Gary went back to school at UF to pursue a master's degree in Wildlife Ecology. His first job after graduation was in land acquisition at the Alachua Conservation Trust in Gainesville, where he helped secure the protection of Newnan's Lake. As that project was reaching its successful conclusion, Gary was contacted by Marjorie Carr and David Godfrey, then-Policy Coordinator at the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE), and invited to serve as David's replacement at the organization after David accepted a job at the Sea Turtle Conservancy. Gary accepted the position and worked at FDE for two years, under Marjorie Carr's leadership, campaigning to restore the Ocklawaha River, which had been dammed as part of the ill-fated Cross Florida Barge Canal project.

In 1999, Gary was invited by David to join STC as its Policy Coordinator. Because he did not have a

background in sea turtles or coastal protection when he joined the organization, Gary set about traveling the state to learn from researchers and advocates as much as he could about sea turtles and the many threats they faced. It quickly became obvious that the biggest issues impacting sea turtles in Florida were related to the disturbance of their nesting beaches. Florida is by far the most important state in the country for sea turtle nesting. To be most effective, Gary had to become an expert on coastal management policy, and it wasn't long before people began turning to him for help in addressing issues affecting beaches around the state.



Gary Appelson (left) speaks with Florida Senator Charlie Crist (right) about the need to support clean water legislation in Florida.

“Laws were on the books to protect Florida’s beaches and sea turtles, but they were being threatened and undermined all the time,” Gary said. “Developers and some politicians were constantly trying to make it easier to develop along the coastline. The biggest focus of my job was to make sure existing laws weren’t weakened and, if possible, to get them strengthened.”

One of these efforts included updating the Model Lighting Ordinance for Marine Turtle Protection, a rule created by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that established guidelines upon which local governments could model their own lighting ordinances. The original Model was certified in 1993, before the creation of LED technology and before researchers developed today’s effective management practices for turtle-friendly lighting. In 2013, Gary began working with the UF Levin College of Law to draft a new Model that reflected advances in technology and research. The new Model, which incorporates many of Gary’s suggestions, was finally updated and certified in 2020.

When Gary first started with the organization, Florida’s Sea Turtle Specialty License Plate had just been established through a campaign led by STC. In a relatively short period of time, the

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turtle tag began to generate millions of dollars in revenue each year, which made it a target for those wanting access to the funding. A big part of Gary's job was to lead

a near-constant battle to prevent lawmakers and special interests from siphoning off funds from the turtle tag for pet projects or otherwise interfering with the ability of the tag to fulfill its mission, which is to fund Florida's important Marine Turtle Protection Program and also to support the Sea Turtle Grants Program that is administered by STC. Now over two decades later, the turtle tag is still providing critical funds for the enforcement of sea turtle regulations and supporting research, education and conservation programs.

Much of Gary's career was spent fighting efforts to build hardened structures, particularly seawalls, on Florida's beaches. This effort involved advocating in favor of beach nourishment as a better alternative, and working to ensure that nourishment projects were done as safely as possible for sea turtles. As part of a long-term strategy aimed at controlling the rate of seawall construction and ensuring that harmful impacts are minimized, STC has supported the establishment of a statewide Beaches Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). For more than 10 years, Gary served on the Steering Committee overseeing the development of the HCP. With his guiding input, the Committee completed the first detailed assessment of all current and potential seawall construction in Florida. With millions of pages of information about sea turtles, beach mice and other species impacted by seawalls, the Statewide HCP is the largest and most complex in the country. Even as Gary retires, the HCP is still being finalized and STC continues to push for its completion and implementation.

These are only a few examples of Gary's conservation achievements during his long tenure as STC Policy Coordinator. Gary attributes much of his success to the relationships he made over the years with fellow advocates, scientists, resource managers and even lawmakers.

Colleagues who have worked with Gary agree.

Tom Ankerson, Director of the Conservation Clinic at the UF Law School, worked with Gary to revise the outdated Model Lighting Ordinance Rule for sea turtles, among many other legal projects. He believes Gary's infinite curiosity and love for the environment leave a lasting impression on everyone he meets.


"Gary has one trait that stands out to me that cannot be taught and won't be easy to replace—infinite curiosity about everything," Ankerson said. "He is like a dog with a bone when he gets a lead on a piece of information that supports his advocacy. His enthusiasm is both endearing and infectious." Holly Parker-Curry, Florida Regional Manager of the Surfrider Foundation, often turned to Gary with questions about complex coastal policy.

"Truly, there is no one more helpful and knowledgeable on all things coastal," Parker-Curry said. "Nor can I think of anyone more thoughtful, kind, or generous with their time. Gary has been a tireless advocate for sea turtles and healthy coasts, and Florida's beaches are immeasurably better because of it."

Although Gary has witnessed incremental positive change among Florida's sea turtle populations and protection laws, he believes the impact of sea level rise will continue to be the most pressing issue for Florida's sea turtles.

"The State must pay better attention to beach management and be more creative in our adaptation to sea level rise," he said. "The beach is the golden goose in Florida and our elected leaders need to understand that. When it comes to managing beaches, what's good for sea turtles is also good for people, and our coastal economies."

Although Gary plans to spend his retirement hiking, traveling to National Parks and paddling down rivers, his environmental work is not truly coming to an end. After all, connecting with nature is what helped inspire him to become an advocate in the first place.

"I don't think I'll ever disconnect," he said. "I'll always be doing environmental things just by playing outside as much as I do and interacting with people outside—doing pretty much what I've done my whole life." 

By Stacey Gallagher
Development Coordinator

Adopted Turtles Return to Tortuguero

Each year from July to September, STC researchers tag and collect data on green turtles that nest on the beaches of Tortuguero, Costa Rica. Many of these turtles are “adopted” by individuals or families in a symbolic show of support for STC’s work. If a turtle that you or your family sponsored was observed on the beach during the 2020 nesting season, your name will appear below:

Adventures by Disney	Joseph Clark	Cyndi and Ed Goldberg	Eugene Kim
Hannah & Hayden Agne	Helle Clausen	Sarah Golden	Kathy & Stuart Kitts
Lisa Ahonen	Simone Cloutier	Barbara Goulette	Hannah Knudsen
Guy Aikenhead	Marsha Cohen	Nina Green	Kayla Kobelin
Jay Alabaster	Sharon Cooper	Konnor Gribbins	Tracy L. Koehler
The Alonso Family	Lindsay Cote	Chris Gurry	Judith Kolesar
Linus Alsing	Susan Crawford	Catherine Gwyer	Meike Koopmans
Doris Altman	Josh Czarnecki	Mariska Hadderingh	David Kosnosky
Daniel Ambrose-Ward	Bertha Moms & Dads	Lauren Hall	Milo Kraegel
Ellie Anderson	Marianus Datubara	Camilla Hallström	Devin Kreidler
Fabricio Atencio	Patrick DeWit	Stuart Hammer	Ingrid Kremers
Christine Aubert	Belle DeBari	Shona Harris	The Krier Family
Mark Bacchus	Linda Dee	Jolein Harro	Josephine Emilie & Lavenbach
Cheryl Bailey	Hannah Dekker	Emily Haupt	Kromann
Vannessa Bakman	Lisa DeLiso	Gillian Henchy	Ethan Kuchma
Juan Pablo Barrenechea	Claudia Dell	Adeline Henon	Deborah Klemenz & Laura
Frank & Lee Battat	Cecilia Dempsey	Will Herndon	Kunz
Grace Batten	Rita Dennis	Lee Herschler	Steffen Kunz
Linn Bauer	Gene O. Desideraggio	Chris Hertz	Ben Lanard
Angela Bauldree	Donora Dingman	Wendy Hickman	Debbie & Jennifer Larder
Kathryn Bazemore	Brenda Dole	Laurie Hill	Missy Larko
Linda Bendick	Rebecca Baak Marinus Dontje	Susan Hirschman	William Lawrence
Jack & Hudson Berry	James Douglas	Katherine Hoffman	Emma Lazrove
Alison Bierschank	Stacey Dresser	Eva-Nadine Hofmann	Legend High School
Katie Billingsley	Christine Eckman	Liz & Josh Hollenback	Denis Legendre
Warren Bischoff	Leah Eidson	Maggie Hollick	Anna Mironova Leonel Bello
Gary Block	Florian Eisele	Luke Holyfield	Brittany Lester
Carole Bocahut	Dina & Hunter Elkins	Jacqueline Hong	Laramie Lile
Annette Boehm	Laurie Ellsworth	Drew Honma	Judith Lindsey
Gabrielle Bolton	Amanda Engels	Mirjam Hoth	Kathy Lipsky
Therese Bonamer	Cornelia & Silvana Ernst-Rohr	Nora Hough	Brian Littel
Hyke Bouma	Marlies Esser	Arthur Mathew Hui	Allison Loftis
Judy & Alan Brainard	Rebecca Evans	Bobbi Hunter	Nicole Lombardo
Jean Branan	The Negulescu Family	Gudrun & Jost Huster	Josie Lorenzo
Warwick Lorne Brown	Raegan & Mackenzie Fasig	Benjamin & Carolina Hutt	Lorraine Lucas
Toni Brown (2)	Snoopy Ferguson	Deanine Isaacson	Karoline Lutz
Sandrine and Yorick Brunet	Sheryl Ferguson	Barbara Jagla	John Mace
Kelsey Bucklew	Jamie Fisher	Husam Jameel	Lesly Madaleno
Michele Buis	Jared & Chandani Flinn	Sophie Jaoven	Joshua Magera
Lora Bulmahn	Famille Fourmanoit-Sottana	Brianna Johnson	PJ Maglione
Regan Burke	Aude Fournier	Malgorzata Kaczinska	Kathy Manuel
Melissa Burr	Fox Group	Dustin Kamrowski	Taira Marble
Sandra Bush	Jana, Aimee & Zoe Friends	Cheryl Kaye	Vicky Marisa
Cactus Tour (3)	Charlie Fultz	Brian Kelly	Megan Marlow
Danelle Campbell	Kristine Furlough	Amanda Kemp	Kathryn Marshall
Madyson Campbell	Connie Gabrielli	LexiAnne Kennedy	Susan May Marshall
Maria Angeles Caraller	Corinne Gardner	Nancy and Ken Kenney	Daphne Martel
Patrick Carmichael	Anna Garibaldi	Charlene Kercherall	Birgit and Linus Mauler
Scarlett Casey	Warren, Connor & Dylan	Pavni Guharoy Ketan Gada	Rick & Dianne McCoy
Silvia Cavallo	Garratt	Wyatt Keusch	Emme McCumiskey
Samantha Cescau	Pam Garrett	Iris Khaund	Kate McDonald
Ric and Pat Chaillaux	Ella Garrison	Lindsey Kiessling	
Collin Christianson	Leah Giblin	Robin Kilbane	

List continued on back...



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Adopted turtles continued...

Michael F. McGuire
 Gavin McKendrick
 Eva McMaster
 Jen McVeay
 Sydney and Eli Melet
 Talula Mihalic
 Giovanni Milani
 Daniel Miller
 Keane Miller
 Leslye & Mike Mize
 Isa Monroy
 Megan Moore
 Alberico Moreno
 Ana Gomez Moreno
 Keiko Moriyama
 Kyran Morris
 Haley Morris
 Sarah Moslowski
 Nicolas Movakowski
 Natalie Mroz
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 TammyNesbitt
 Rune Bathum Nexoe
 Julie Kijan Ngimat
 Emily Nipps
 Pauline Nixon
 Cecilia Northcutt
 Alyssa Norton
 Katie O'Connor
 Olivia Offermann
 Erin O'Hara
 Helen Omelchuk

Kristina Ottander
 Sam & Seth Parrish
 Soteria Perry
 Darby Peterson
 Kate Phelps
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 Taylor Pleimann
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 Emily Pool
 Galen Posch
 Aldith Powell
 Katherine Quackenbush
 Hayden R.
 Trish Rea
 Carole Rebreyend &
 Marielle Mokhtari
 Lisa Reed
 Kerri Reisinger
 Grayson ReVille
 Christine Reynolds
 Guusje Rieter
 Sarah Rios
 Ava Breck Robinson
 Loren Rodriguez
 Haylee Roe
 Edmond de Rothschild
 Luan Ruifeng
 Stevie-Marie Rumney
 Sarah Runge
 Walter & Patricia Ryan
 Ella and Eetu Salo

Gary Sanchez
 Marcia Scanlan
 Allison Schaper
 Stephen and Jill Schell
 Caitlyn Schelp
 Richard Scheuch
 Jocelyn Schiller
 Paul Schmidt
 Ed Schulmerich
 Luke Shafnisky
 Bhavin Shah
 Lily Sills
 Annabel Sinclair
 Lei Tie SJ Zhou
 Avery Skelton
 Michael J. Smith
 Julie Smith
 Ashley Smith
 Matt Smith
 Luna Smith
 Jill Snyder
 Jeremy Spencer
 Kimberly Stadler
 Deborah Stam
 Anika Stanwiens
 Mateusz Stec
 Jacob Stephens
 Terry Stone
 Kerry & Georgia Summitt
 Alice Sweeny
 Nancy Thoman
 Diane & Charles Trenka
 Alice Trieu

Troy & Carine
 Polly Unger
 Bev Unglaube
 University Western Washington
 Michelle Valverde
 Karlijn van der Aa
 Greet Van der Laak
 Jan Van Elburg
 Claudia Van Maastricht
 Phoebe Vandeman
 Mariangel Martin Villa Lobos
 Lauren Wagman
 Amy Walker
 Roberta Wedge
 Gretchen Weis
 Nicole Weller
 Paddy Weston
 Samantha Whalen
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