

OUR HISTORY

In the very early 1980s, a broad stretch of coastal plain jutting into Ninigret Pond—land that had been the Charlestown Naval Auxiliary Landing Field—was obtained by the town of Charlestown for a park and by the U. S. Department of the Interior for a national wildlife refuge.

Visionaries seized the opportunity to establish a nature center to serve as a gateway to the new wildlife refuge and help people to develop an appreciation of, a respect for, and a connectedness with the natural world.

The site for the Nature Center overlooked a spring-fed freshwater pond. The building chosen had been the Chief Petty Officer's residence. Severely damaged over the years because it had not been used since the Navy left Charlestown in the mid-1970s, the interior was stripped to the framing, and the building was moved to its present site and sealed from the weather by the town of Charlestown. Extensive renovations, paid for by contributions to the Frosty Drew Memorial Fund, followed. Many people and businesses volunteered time and equipment. On July 3, 1983, the Frosty Drew Nature Center opened its doors.

Since 1983, we have made many improvements to the Nature Center and its grounds. Then, in 1988, we added the Observatory, and in 2010, the John G. Drew Sky Theatre was completed.

Because of support from Charlestown; grants from the Rhode Island Foundation, Champlin Foundations, the Prince Charitable Trust of Chicago, Kimball Foundation, and Concerned Citizens of Rhode Island; donations from individuals and businesses; and the efforts of volunteers, countless youngsters and adults have been able to experience southern Rhode Island's natural wonders.



EDWIN "FROSTY" DREW

An environmentalist active in many groups, including the Rhode Island Audubon Society and Concerned Citizens of Rhode Island, Edwin "Frosty" Drew (1948–1976) also served as president of the Rhode Island chapter of the American Littoral Society and chairman of Rhode Island's Commission on Energy.

In 1990 Frosty was inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame for his contributions to the state's natural environmental heritage and the fame and distinction he brought to his state and nation.

The Frosty Drew Nature Center and Observatory stand as a memorial to his dedication, enthusiasm, and hard work in raising public awareness of issues surrounding Ninigret Pond, the barrier beach to the south, and the surrounding coastal plain—priceless natural assets of the town of Charlestown and the state of Rhode Island as a whole.



FROSTY DREW NATURE CENTER & OBSERVATORY

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OUR FACILITY

Frosty Drew Nature Center

Sited on a knoll overlooking a small pond, the Nature Center has an exhibit/meeting room and a library. Our naturalists offer educational programs year-round for young and old alike. Programs and activities introduce people to and involve them with the natural world and help them to feel good about their place in it—one of the first steps toward environmental stewardship. The Nature Center and the Sky Theatre are handicap accessible.

Frosty Drew Observatory

A dome with a sliding shutter, the Observatory houses a 16-inch Meade LX200 telescope. Under an extraordinarily dark sky—said to be the darkest between Boston and New York—visitors can experience observational astronomy, marvel at such wonders as the rings of Saturn and features on the moon, and learn how the universe began, how stars shine, why stars are colored, and what the planets are like.



John G. Drew Sky Theatre

The Sky Theatre is a pleasing room with comfortable chairs and a large overhead screen. It is connected electronically to our Observatory, and astronomers are able to project views from our telescope directly onto the screen in the Sky Theatre. In a way that cannot be achieved in a planetarium, observing celestial objects and witnessing astronomical events is available to more people. The Sky Theatre is also a teaching resource as other visual material can be projected as well.