



2025 Annual Report



DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Director Dennis Kois with Yerkes supporter and Williams Bay Women's Leadership Center founder Ann Drake and renowned architect Jeanne Gang.

2025 was a year of remarkable growth at Yerkes, with expanded programming and increased engagement. Since reopening in 2022, tens of thousands of visitors have joined us for tours, lectures, concerts, and family programs. Thousands more have explored the trails and gardens in our 50-acre arboretum. Each year, Yerkes continues to strengthen its role as a leader in connecting science, nature, history, and the arts.

We also completed several critical projects thanks to donor support. More than two dozen antiquated radiators were replaced throughout the building, saving countless hours of staff time and improving daily operations. Building restoration continued as well, with brick repair and replacement on the south parapet finished in 2025.

A milestone was the completion of Yerkes' Site and Facilities Plan, which outlines a vision for stewarding the site over the next decade. The plan balances preservation of our historic Olmsted landscape with the kind of expanded access and enhanced experiences expected by contemporary visitors.

This Annual Report also reflects a refreshed identity, including a new logo, developed in partnership with Madison-based agency The Digital Ring. Inspired by Yerkes' four core areas of focus, science, nature, history, and the arts, the new look reflects the multifaceted spirit of our work. While honoring its legacy as an observatory, Yerkes is becoming a place where discovery extends far beyond a single discipline. We are deeply grateful to our donors, volunteers, partners, and community members whose support makes this work possible. Together, we are preserving Yerkes' legacy and shaping its future.

-Dennis Kois, Executive Director

In 2025, we continued to unlock the magic of Yerkes. We celebrated our 5th birthday with our first fundraiser and welcomed more visitors to a broader array of programming. The Candlelight Walks saw over 800 attendees exploring the grounds, and our summer programs tent helped us test the demand for our Speaker Series which continues to sell out.

Astronomers from the Paris Observatory collaborated on site with our staff on new research. The arboretum continues its renewal process with more gardens and paths. Key to our accomplishments has been our corps of dedicated volunteers; a big thank you to everyone who donated time and energy this year.

We'll continue to offer many of our popular programs, but there are even more new speakers and events in the works for 2026. We can't wait for you to come and experience the wonders of our campus.

-Tom Nickols, Yerkes Future Foundation Board Chair

BOARD CHAIR'S REPORT



PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS



Yerkes Future Foundation's 5th Birthday Party Fundraiser celebrated the past five years of restoration and reimagination at Yerkes.



New radiators and pipes were installed, saving Director of Facilities and Grounds Marc Stanek countless hours each winter morning.



Walt Chadick and Jana Lund with Gov. Tony Evers and Dept. of Tourism Secretary Anne Sayers after being nominated for the Governor's Arts, Culture, and Heritage Award.



Dr. Amanda Bauer presented "What the Night Sky Teaches Us About About Being Human" at the inaugural TEDx Lake Geneva event.



A local class planted a tree in the Olmsted Arboretum on Arbor Day with support from the Yerkes Landscape Committee.



S. Carey of the band Bon Iver performed a sold-out concert in the **Hagenah Rotunda**, delivering an unforgettable evening of music.

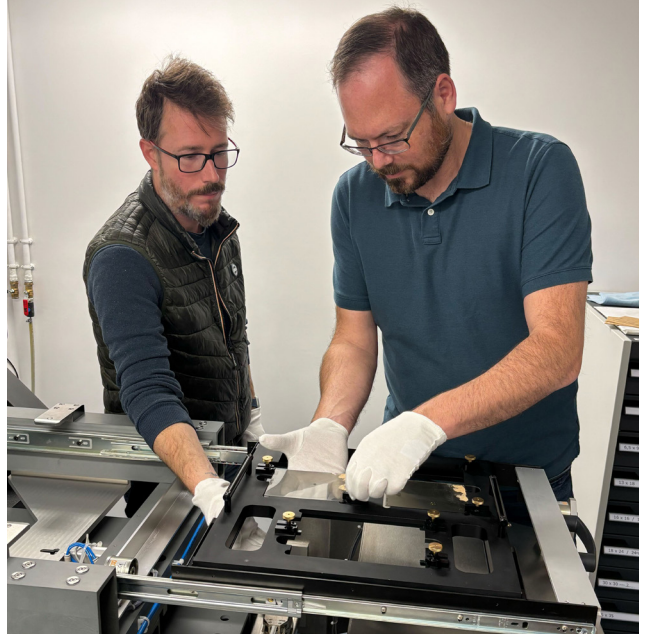
ASTRONOMY AND RESEARCH

Discovering new insights about our Universe through observation and innovation remains core to our science vision and mission. A transformative milestone occurred when Yerkes officially took ownership of the collection of historic glass astronomical plates; at 180,000, one of the four largest in the world. This means we're now able to explore the full potential of research with the plates, expand their use in education and outreach programs, and build new scientific collaborations.

A great example is Yerkes' work with researchers from the Paris Observatory in Meudon, France. After staff from Paris visited Yerkes last May to explore the collection, our own Dr. Amanda Bauer and Dr. Luke Schmidt traveled to France in October hand-carrying a sample of 50 Yerkes plates to be scanned at the New Astrometric Reduction of Old Observations (NAROO) digitization center. The imaging of plates from the early 1900s, using a new scanner that can resolve down to the level of particles of silver emulsion on the plate, will allow astronomers to calculate more accurate contemporary orbits for the moons and planets they include. This will improve the accuracy of trajectories of future spacecraft missions.

Other work in 2025 included major improvements to the large reflecting telescopes at Yerkes. In order to collect as much light as possible, telescope mirrors must be recoated with a thin layer of aluminum at regular intervals. In April, the primary and secondary mirrors of the Yerkes 24" telescope were removed and recoated for the first time in more than 15 years. Both mirrors returned home to Yerkes in late November, and reinstallation is planned once the weather warms.

Dr. Luke Schmidt assembled and opened a new 3D printing lab thanks to generous donations from the Yerkes community. This new lab builds on the traditions and supplements the capabilities of the historic **Barsanti Machine Shop** in the Yerkes basement. 3D printing plays an invaluable role in Luke's research, allowing him to rapidly prototype parts for new astronomical instruments and also replace historic components of equipment around the observatory that are no longer commercially available. Supporters of the 3D printing lab were invited to a behind-the-scenes tour with Luke in August. Together, these advancements strengthen Yerkes Observatory's ability to preserve its legacy while enabling innovative astronomical research into the future.



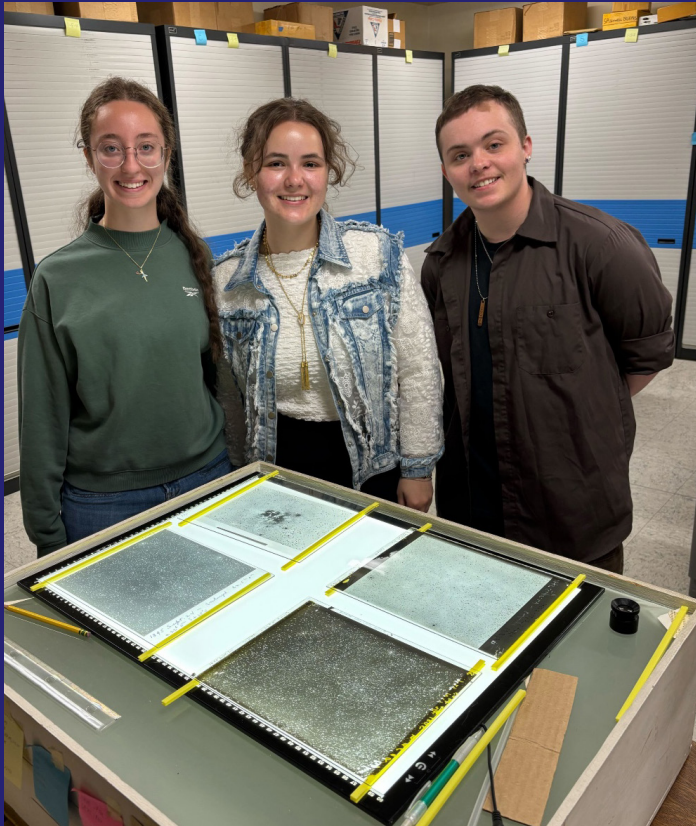
Dr. Luke Schmidt (right) with a Yerkes glass plate at Paris Observatory



Locations of scientists or scientific institutions collaborating with Yerkes

-Dr. Amanda Bauer, Montgomery Foundation Deputy Director and Head of Science & Education

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



Summer 2025 undergraduate interns

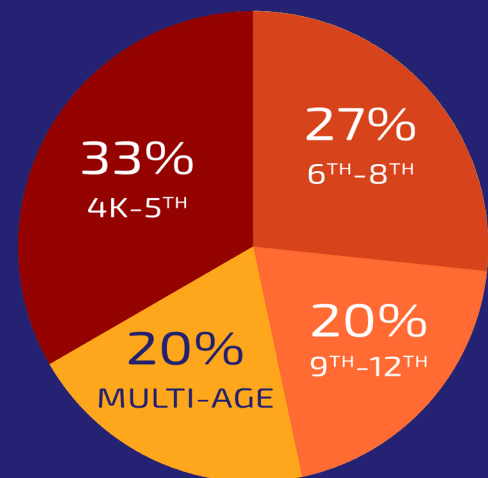
Yerkes Observatory's education and outreach offerings, designed to inspire curiosity, strengthen STEM skills, and broaden public engagement with astronomy, continued to expand in 2025. The observatory offers programs for K-12 students, professional development for educators across the State of Wisconsin, internships, and public outreach events, positioning Yerkes as a hub for lifelong learning.

The K-12 school visit program welcomed nearly 1,500 in-person students in 2025, a 10% increase from 2024, and 500 students through virtual visits. Yerkes' school programs received overwhelmingly positive feedback from educators, with 100% of survey respondents recommending the experience to their colleagues. The observatory also welcomed 15 science educators for professional development, helping keep their knowledge of science and astronomy current and active.

Yerkes continued its Undergraduate Intern Research Program by selecting three new summer interns from 85 applicants for a paid, nine-week research experience. Interns conducted original research in time-domain astronomy using Yerkes' historic glass plates and 40" reflector, focusing on how stars within globular clusters and the expanding gas around planetary nebulae change over time. Interns also participated in seminars and excursions and presented their work to staff and board members. Following completion of the program, two of the interns presented their research at the American Astronomical Society meeting in Phoenix. Yerkes also welcomed paid and unpaid middle- and high-school interns. These students contributed to research, supported events, developed their scientific communication, coding and CAD design skills, and built a deeper understanding of astronomy as a career.

Public outreach remained a major strength at the observatory, with four sold-out Open Houses, the successful launch of a Deaf Night Out event created in collaboration with an American Sign Language-fluent astronomer, as well as two Astronomy on Tap events that each attracted over 200 attendees. Our popular Exploring the Night Sky tours continued to expand and sell out, and the introduction of hands-on telescope workshops proved popular. Collectively, these programs helped Yerkes connect with its community and expanded access to science for a range of audiences.

-Mallory Conlon, Outreach Astronomer



2025 K-12 educational visits by grade level

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



Architect Jeanne Gang spoke to a sold-out crowd in the programs tent as part of the 2025 Speaker Series.

Yerkes continues to become a platform for big ideas and bold creativity. This past year brought an extraordinary mix of experiences and voices from internationally acclaimed architects and astrophysicists to Grammy-winning musicians, master gardeners, and artists. It was also a year of experimentation and growth. In order to expand our capacity and understand demand for our programs, the observatory debuted a programs tent last summer that featured a stage designed by Chicago's Commonplace Projects and seating for 200. The tent, which will return this coming summer, helped Yerkes better understand the size needs of our our future Education and Visitor Center.

Among the highlights of the 2025 Summer Speaker Series was a sold-out conversation between renowned architect Jeanne Gang, Williams Bay Women's Leadership Center founder Ann Drake, and Yerkes Executive Director Dennis Kois. We also welcomed *New York Times* bestselling author and astrophysicist Dr. Katie Mack, whose mind-bending talk on "The End of Everything" was a hit with an enthusiastic crowd. Our roster of outside-the-box speakers continued all summer, including the hosta master of the Midwest who runs an autobody shop in his arboretum, a family talk with the offbeat beekeeper who runs the hives at Yerkes and the Brookfield Zoo, and hands-on workshops with America's foremost perennial plant expert, Roy Diblik.

The arts at Yerkes began with music. Highlights last year included a concert by S. Carey of two-time Grammy winners Bon Iver. Carey and his band played a sold-out and unforgettable "Living Room" show in the **Hagenah Rotunda** in the middle of a snowstorm. Several transcendent concerts took place beneath **The Sharon and Charles Angell Historic Refractor**, most notably a performance by legendary singer-songwriter Pieta Brown and a series of shows featuring pieces written at Yerkes by AREPO, an ensemble based in Norway. Those new works came about via AREPO's prior participation in the Blackbird Creative Lab, a music residency at Yerkes run by four-time Grammy winners Eighth Blackbird.

Yerkes also hosted public events that connected science, nature, history, and the arts, including the World's Tallest Glass Tree Festival for its fourth and final year at the observatory. Over five thousand people visited the six-day festival, led by glass artist Jason Mack and his team. During our fall Candlelight Walks, two thousand candles lined the four miles of hiking and walking paths Yerkes has installed in the past few years throughout the Olmsted Arboretum. Over 800 people walked the illuminated pathways and experienced the splendor of our fifty acres beneath the dark sky.

And for the third consecutive year, Yerkes was a finalist for the state's top award for Arts, Culture, and Heritage at the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism. This statewide recognition is a testament to our work creating entertaining, intellectual, and accessible experiences for all.

-Walt Chadick, Director of Programs

LANDSCAPE AND GROUNDS

Yerkes advanced its landscape vision with a strong focus on accessibility, ecological stewardship, and community partnership. Across the 50-acre campus, improvements were guided by a commitment to keeping the grounds welcoming, resilient, and authentic to their historic character.

Expanding access was a key priority. Planning and public approvals got underway for construction of the **Blair Family Foundation Play/Space**, the innovative STEAM playground that will introduce families to our mission to connect science and art. The ADA trail in the **Colman Loop** was widened and a new accessible path built to connect visitors directly to the apiary, opening more of the Olmsted-designed landscape, including gardens, prairie, and pollinator habitats, to all.



A goat herd cleared invasive species in the arboretum (photo by Will Borgen).

Sustainability continued to shape our land management practices. Thanks to support from a trustee, a herd of goats was brought in to clear four acres of invasive species and ready it for replanting, with additional visits planned for 2026. Restoration efforts also included clearing dead and fallen trees to improve forest health and safety, supported by local Scout groups. Forty flowering crabapples, redbuds, and dogwoods were also planted to further restore the Olmsted Brothers' original plan, and second-graders from Walworth Jt. School District #1 joined us on Arbor Day to plant a tree, fostering an early connection to stewardship.

New garden spaces also took root this year. The **Lucy Otzen Welcome Garden**, created through donor support and the dedication of volunteers, now greets visitors at the entrance. An experimental "grid" garden was introduced as a living laboratory to explore how plant communities interact and thrive. This project was made possible through generous financial support from the Lake Geneva Garden



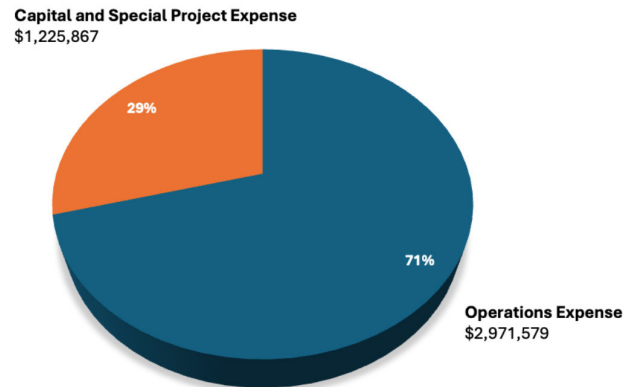
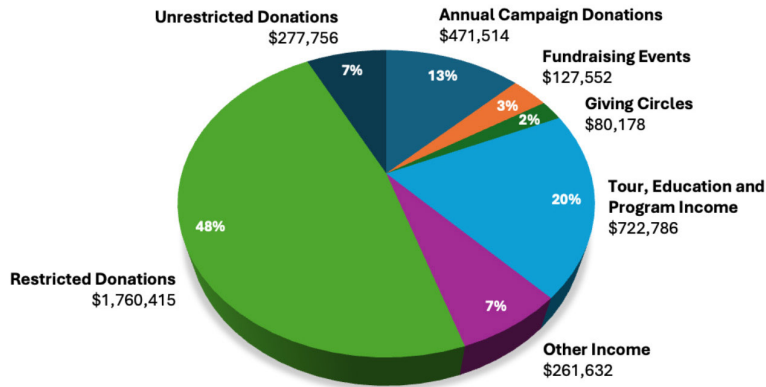
A new garden welcomes visitors at the entrance.

Club and contributions of plant material, expertise, and time from Roy Diblik, Northwind Perennial Farm, Gerry Wilhelm, and Midwest Groundcover. Another significant achievement was the installation of gardens designed by Jeff Epping, retired Director of Horticulture at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, around the building's southeast edge.

Above all, 2025's progress reflects the extraordinary dedication of our volunteers and partners. Their time, knowledge, and care continue to shape a landscape that is more accessible, more sustainable, and more deeply connected to the community it serves.

-The Yerkes Landscape Committee

Yerkes Future Foundation 2025



Grow Our Galaxy Campaign & Special Project Gifts
(not included in Donations, above)

\$6,936,710

Donors to Yerkes: **1,092** (+10.3% vs 2024) New Donors: **51%**

Visitors*: **19,652** (+26.2% vs 2024) *Paid tour, education & program visitors

Website: **119,910 unique visitors** (+34.7% vs 2024)



Engagements **447,479** / Audience **+19.2%** (vs 2024)



Impressions **3,262,483** / Audience **+24.5%** (vs 2024)



E-news open rate: **54.5%** / Subscribers **+39.6%** (vs 2024)

2025 DONORS

The following individuals, foundations, and organizations made generous contributions to Yerkes in 2025.

Philanthropy at every level helps care for Yerkes' historic campus while advancing its role as a vibrant center for learning and discovery. Each gift strengthens our ability to serve the public and pursue our mission. We are deeply grateful for this collective commitment to Yerkes.

\$100,000+

The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
Lori and Tito Beveridge
Michael D. and Jolynn Blair Family Foundation
Charles and Dianna Colman
John and Dana Hagenah
Kenneth & Harle Montgomery Foundation
Karl Otzen

\$50,000-\$99,999

The AMD Family Fund
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Richard Kron and Deborah Bekken
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Mike and Marie Keefe
The LIZ Peace Fund
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Aaron and Yeming Rankin
Mark M. Welter Foundation

\$10,000-\$24,999

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Dan Gallagher
Brian and Susan Griffith
Thomas Gross
Steven Hall
Terry Kirch



Sharon Angell with her late husband, Charles.

A VERY SPECIAL GIFT

Yerkes is honored to announce that a generous major gift from The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation has been made to name **The Sharon and Charles Angell Historic Refractor**.

This gift, the largest contribution to date to Yerkes' ongoing Grow Our Galaxy Campaign, provides transformational support for our mission and represents a profound commitment to Yerkes' future. This summer Yerkes will be unveiling the official naming of the legendary Yerkes telescope, in recognition of this remarkable commitment to Yerkes.

We extend our deepest thanks to The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation for their visionary gift and belief in the power of connecting science, nature, history, and the arts.

Cathy and Jamie Koch
Dennis Kois and Kelly
Gauthier
Clinton and Louise Kuzmich
Lake Geneva Garden Club
Foundation
Christopher Lynch
Marion Restoration
Edward and Mary McCarthy
John and Sandy Miller
Thomas Morley
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\$500-\$999

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Raymond Wiltgen
Gary Wincek
Chuck Woods

If you have questions about the 2025 Annual Report or are interested in learning more about Yerkes' programs and initiatives, please contact us at info@yerkesobservatory.org or call (262) 245-5555.



 YERKES