

# Nurture Nature Center in Easton explores flooding and other climate issues



Rachel Hogan Carr, director of the Nurture Nature Center, a new community and science center in Easton, talks to visitors. (ED KOSKEY JR., SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL)

By **Kathy Lauer-Williams, Of The Morning Call**

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**A** 6-foot globe suspended in the middle of the room is covered by thousands of moving dots that look like ants swarming over the Earth.

What do the dots represent, a group of children is asked.

"Fish?" said one child. "Birds?" said another.

"Those are airplanes," said Gabby Salazar. "This shows global air traffic and the 83,000 flights a day that cross the skies."

Salazar is a docent for a program called Science on a Sphere, presented at the new Nurture Nature Center in Easton. Presenting information and leaving the audience to ponder the impacts on our world is the goal of the center.

"We think of the sphere as conversation starter," says Rachel Hogan Carr, center director. "Our mission is to use science and art to start a dialogue."

The Science on a Sphere program, one of 80 in the world, is the centerpiece of the new science education center, which opened in November.

The animated globe displays high-resolution video about the Earth and planetary science. It was installed in Easton in 2010 after the center received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Every Saturday, the community can see a general sphere demonstration as well as Rising Waters, the center's own program on flood education. It's shared internationally with the Science on a Sphere network of more than 70 museums and organizations in a dozen countries.

In the general show, the globe, described as kind of like a "reverse planetarium," creates a 360-degree image of natural phenomena like the Japanese tsunami, earthquakes, solar flares and the path of the Gulf stream.

Other programs include Journey through the Solar System and Two Billion More Coming to Dinner, about population growth. All are available for school and other group visits.

Five years ago, the idea of opening a science-based education center was far from the mind of Carr, who was working as a community organizer with Project Easton.

In 2006, after Easton suffered its third major flood in a 22-month period, Carr was contacted by renowned labor negotiator Theodore Kheel. Kheel had been developing the former Hotel Easton when it flooded. He decided to use his Nurture Nature Foundation in New York City to establish a center in Easton to examine the environmental reasons behind flooding.

"He was a very influential and special man," says Carr. "He worked on labor issues but considered this the greatest conflict to resolve." Kheel died in 2010.

Carr teamed up with Kheel's daughter, Jane Stanley, a Baltimore attorney, to investigate the issues.

"We began a path together," Carr says. "He cared about environmental issues, and wanted to know why it was flooding in Easton. His daughter and I shaped the plan that led to the creation of an accidental science center."

The idea culminated in 2008 when the center partnered with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, **National Weather Service** and the Mid-Atlantic River Forecast Center to develop a flood awareness program.

"The missing piece was educating the public," Carr says. "We decided to put the building to use for flood education."

The flood education campaign's message was "Floods happen. Lessen the Loss." It won three awards and produced a website, [focusonfloods.org](http://focusonfloods.org), an animated film on flood readiness; a four-part radio series and flood

level warning magnets that are available through the center and the National Weather Service.

But with the opening of the center, Carr says it's about "more than just flooding."

"It's about getting people thinking about the environmental risks facing communities," she says.

In a spacious building at 518 Northampton St. that was one of Easton's first movie theaters, the center occupies the second and third floors with five art galleries, a large seminar space and the room in which the sphere is suspended.

Carr says the idea of having art exhibits was added to bring in people who might not be initially interested in science.

Current exhibits include "Green Visions," a juried exhibit that includes varied media exploring visions of sustainability; green building and landscape design by William Dohe and Judith Goldstein; and "Close Up, Close By," photographs of nature taken in and around Easton.

In the center's community hall, an exhibit, "Fresh Food for Thought," was culled from art posted on the center's Facebook page in response to a question about fresh food in the Lehigh Valley.

Carr says the exhibits will change frequently. "It's a perpetual work in progress," she says.

"We want our art driven by the community and what matters to them," Carr says. "We want this center to be a place where someone can make a mark."

A focal point in the main room is an 8-by-24-foot mural of "Manifest Destiny" by contemporary artist Alexis Rockman. It depicts the Brooklyn waterfront underwater in the year 5000. The center has one of only two full-size replicas of the painting.

It is backed by an equally large piece called "River Life" by Easton's Emmy-winning illustrator Maciek Albrecht. It shows the "goal state" of a healthy river, with recreation and wildlife.

Also on display are a timeline of photos and newspaper stories of Easton's floods from Hurricane Diane in 1955 through 2011's Hurricane Irene.

In the seminar room, the community can attend forums such as a recent one on "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" and screenings of films such as "No Impact Man," a documentary about a New York man who spent a year trying to eliminate his impact on the planet.

Next, Carr says the center plans to build a demonstration rooftop garden on the center's flat roof. It will show how to manage water runoff and grow food in a small space.

She says interest in the center is growing.

"The most important thing is to get people to start a conversation about climate change and its impact on us," she says. "One person might feel empowered to lobby for legislation and another to clean up a stream. Everyone's path is different."

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## THE NURTURE NATURE CENTER

•**What:** A new science-based education center

•**Where:** 518 Northampton St., Easton

•**Admission:** Free

•**When:** Open to public 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays and 1-4 p.m. Saturdays.

•**Special programs:** 1:30 p.m. Saturdays: "Best of the Sphere," 10 displays on 6-foot illuminated globe, including Japanese tsunami and the Earth at night; \$5, \$3 children. 2:30 p.m. Saturdays: "Rising Waters," how population and land use affect flooding; free.

•**Info:** [nuturenaturecenter.org](http://nuturenaturecenter.org), 610-253-4432

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