

# Allaire Community Farm

*Nurturing through Nature*

by Jill Ocone

*A*s the old saying from the movie *Field of Dreams* goes, “If you build it, they will come.” Joann and Sean Burney proved that adage by building Allaire Community Farm. And on a wing and a prayer, they continue to come.



photo by Jill Ocone; inset photo courtesy of Allaire Community Farm

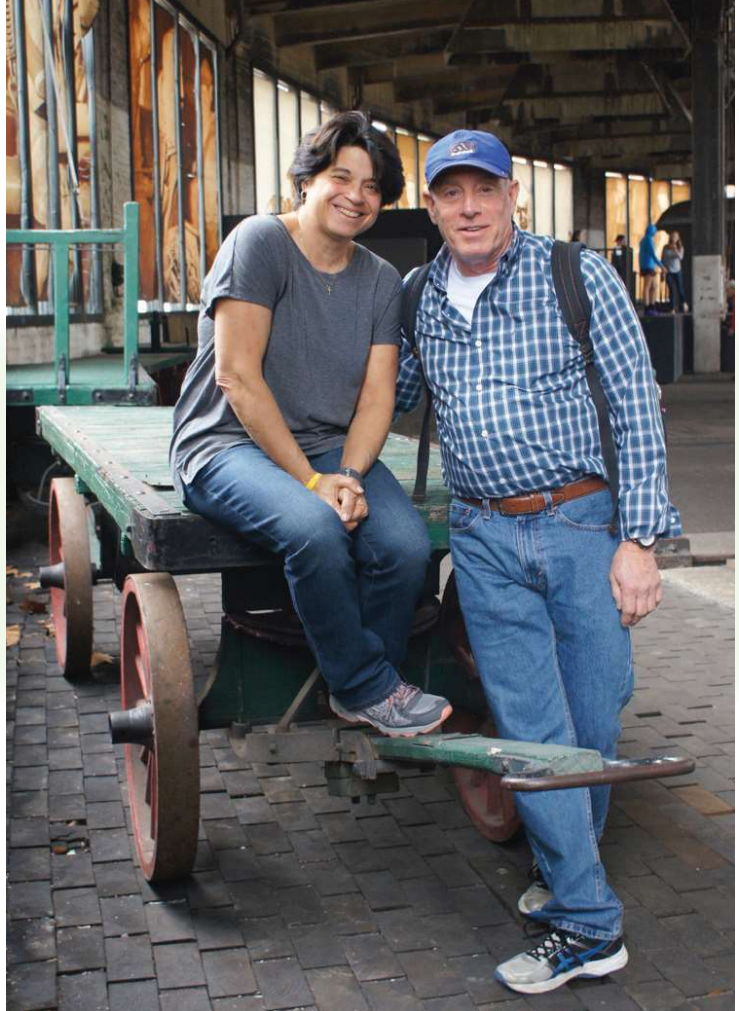


**Allaire Community Farm in Wall Township is a one-of-a-kind, registered New Jersey non-profit sanctuary with a mission of rescuing both animals and people of all ages.**



*“To have happiness and joy,  
you have to have a purpose in life.  
And you cannot experience pure joy  
without helping someone  
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— Joann Burney*

**Joann and Sean Burney, founders  
of Allaire Community Farm.**



courtesy of Allaire Community Farm

One of the last working farms in Wall Township, Allaire Community Farm is a one-of-a-kind, registered New Jersey non-profit sanctuary with a mission of rescuing both animals and people of all ages. “We are an animal rescue with a mission of inclusion—we nurture with nature,” says co-founder and Executive Director Joann Burney. “We support special needs populations—teens suffering from mental health issues, veterans with PTSD, and local families battling cancer.”

With faith as their co-pilot, Joann and her husband, Sean, first established the farm in 2013 on a nearby property after the family had suffered considerable financial losses as a result of the 2008 recession. Joann, a former college Dean, returned to work as a kindergarten teacher at the private school her two children attended while her husband chose to fulfill a lifelong dream. “Sean always wanted to be a farmer, so he followed his passion,” Burney said. “It took eight years to get here, but if you do what you are passionate about, the rest will come.”

Allaire Community Farm became an official non-profit organization in 2015, and in 2018, the farm bought its current location at 1923 Baileys Corner Road, complete with a one hundred-year-old barn.

### **Back to a Simpler Time**

The property has been considerably upgraded and modified since its purchase, including the erection of ten

new farm buildings. Strolling the picturesque grounds transports you back to a simpler time, where the atmosphere and landscape draws attention away from technological devices and news feeds.

The gardens and greenhouses on the property support local families with medical or financial needs. On-site buildings include: a pony

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Ocone III





*The farm museum barn and barrel train.*

barn, donated by John and Jill Shibles; a farm museum barn, donated by Friends of the Spring Lake Five; the picnic pavilion, donated by Robert and Lorraine McGirr of Clayton & McGirr Funeral Home; and an indoor animal barn, donated by Barbara and Donald Clayton.

## Supporting Special Needs Populations and At-Risk Teens

With New Jersey rated as having one of the largest special-needs populations in the nation, Allaire Community Farm tends to that growing need at the Jersey Shore by providing a place filled with opportunities. “One of our program participants became part of our farm family full-time after aging out of his school program at twenty-one-years-old,” Burney said.

The Farm also works with mental health agencies in Monmouth County to provide a place where at-risk teens suffering from anxiety and depression can volunteer their time and, in turn, improve their confidence and self-esteem. Burney shared the story of Sarah, a fourteen-year-old feeder volunteer who first met the resident cow, Lola Grace, when she was eleven years

old. “When Sarah is here, Lola Grace works her magic, and the farm heals her. That’s the beauty of this place,” Burney said. “We only provide the venue and the environment, and the healing—it just happens.”

## Pivoting During the Pandemic

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a major loss in donations and revenue that fund

the farm’s operations, including the cancellation of the annual Hoedown fundraiser and their temporary closure due to shut-down orders. “The whole key to being successful as a non-profit, especially during a pandemic, is to be flexible and pivot as needed,” Burney said. Pivoting for the farm resulted in opening an organic produce market and providing contactless shopping. In addition, the farm allowed local vendors to sell homemade goods such as honey, candles, and baked goods in the farm’s on-site market once they were allowed to reopen, which turned into a win-win for everyone. “We’ve got a date for our 2021 Hoedown (Saturday, August 21), and we hope it will be able to go on as scheduled,” Burney said.

Jill Ocone

## Programs and Community Resources

Allaire Community Farm is open six days a week and provides a number of resources and programs for the community while continually expanding and fine-tuning its offerings.

**Farm Market.** The farm market is open during operating hours and sells fresh produce, eggs, fair-trade products, seasonal items, and goods from local vendors.

**Petting Zoo.** Zoo tours, barrel train rides, wagon rides, and more are available during operating hours thanks to the multitude of volunteers who help man the various attractions. Almost all of the animals were rescued from former neglectful situations. Visitors will encounter Nigerian Dwarf goats, sheep, chickens, rabbits, guinea hens, ducks, geese, Tofu the Turkey, a donkey, a nine-hundred-pound pig named Lily (who herself was rescued from a slaughter house), Al the Alpaca, Lola Grace the cow, and a number of horses.

To help defer costs related to the care and feeding of the rescued animals, the petting zoo entrance fee is \$5. per adult and \$3. per child. All guests need to check-in at the farm market upon arrival. Animal feed can be purchased for \$2. a bag and can only be used for the animals in the



*Items for sale at the farm market.*

Jill Ocone



petting zoo. Barrel train rides and wagon rides, when available, are \$2. per person.

**HOPE Program.** The HOPE Program (Harvesting Occupational and Personal Excellence) provides an integrated approach to supporting individuals in developing functional socialization and work skills. Participants are young adults, ages twenty-one and up, who have aged out of traditional school programs. “We receive grants to help us run the program,” Burney said. “This program gives the aged-out special needs population a place to be purposeful and meaningful.” The four-day-a-week program, run by a New Jersey Certified Teacher and Speech Language Pathologist, strengthens communication, social, and executive

the direction of Monmouth County Freeholder Thomas Arnone, the farm embarked upon an initiative to bring together urban and suburban students to address diversity issues by interacting with each other. The students work together to learn the importance of healthy eating and organic gardening practices, and in the process, they make new friends. At the completion of the semester, a garden is planted at each school so that students can practice what they learned and share healthy produce with classmates.

**After-school, Weekend, And Home-school Programs.** Allaire Community Farm offers a number of after-school, weekend, and home-school programs throughout the year. The Homeschool Educational Program allows students in grades four to eight to learn about New Jersey’s geography, geology, weather, and water through the study of the state’s animals, plants, flowers, trees, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. The program also educates about early Native Americans and European settlers. Students learn through experiments, projects, arts and crafts, games, and field trips through semester-long, fee-based programs. After-school and weekend programs include “James and His Farmers,” which teaches children chores that are involved in running a

farm. They also offer “Roots to Fruits with Sasha,” an eight-week, fee-based gardening program for children on weekends, and “Feathers and Fur,” an after-school, fee-based, ten-week program that includes crafts, scavenger hunts, nature walks, games, animal fun, and seasonal gardening for children ages four to nine. Equine programs for children are also offered throughout the year. All programs have limited capacity and follow all suggested health guidelines. Pre-registration and payment in advance are required for all programs. The farm welcomes summer camp and school field trips.

**Special Events.** The farm holds special events throughout the year such as the Special Needs Spring Festival, weekend musical performances, and special seasonal attractions such as the Harvest Festival and Old-Fashioned Christmas on the farm.

**Birthday Parties.** Allaire Community Farm is a unique venue for year-round birthday parties held at their picnic pavilion. Party guests visit the petting zoo, milk the mechanical cow, and take a scenic, tractor-pulled wagon ride around the farm.

**Therapeutic Offerings.** The farm also offers a variety of therapeutic programs to help those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder,

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courtesy of Allaire Community Farm

*All the Alpaca is one of the rescue animals visitors will encounter at the petting zoo.*

skills while teaching farm-related, pre-vocational skills on-site. Each day focuses on specific areas and skill development. For instance, on “farm market operation” day, participants engage in hands-on operation tasks involved in running the market, including customer service, inventory, product development, maintenance, and farm tour leadership. Other days are devoted to animal husbandry, plant care/horticultural, and horsemanship. “The most recent program, which can take a maximum of eight students, was filled in two days. We can teach a variety of skills that give a future to this population,” Burney said.

**School Urban Suburban Healthy Initiative (SUSHI).** In 2016, under



*The magic of animal therapy with Lola Grace.*

courtesy of Allaire Community Farm



anxiety, and depression. The Animal Therapy program allows participants to read to, groom, and pet the farm animals as a way to reduce stress and anxiety. Therapeutic horseback riding and carriage driving programs assist participants in relaxation while developing confidence, coordination, and muscle tone. Participants are taught by a certified P.A.T.H (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) riding and driving instructor how to control a horse while riding, which can improve sensory and motor skills. Working with the horses also promotes communication and attention skills as well as a positive increase in self-esteem.

### **Horseback Riding Lessons.**

Allaire Community Farm offers on-site horseback riding lessons for ages six through adult, where students develop horsemanship skills including grooming, tacking, riding, and care. The farm offers both English and Western style lessons.

## **Looking Toward the Future**

Joanne and Sean Burney are not done yet. Their full vision for Allaire Community Farm will become a reality while they serve the community in even more ways by broadening their outreach. Over the winter, the farm welcomed the addition of both an indoor riding barn and a temperature-regulated Learning Resource Center. Burney said, “The Learning Resource Center, sponsored by Peter and Mary Grandich, has a community room, a kitchen, and bathrooms, and both facilities will enable us to remain open year-round.” The Indoor Equestrian Center was sponsored by Mary Ellen Harris, President of the Golden Dome Foundation, in honor of her late husband Peter.

The last part of the farm’s future site plan is the completion of the “Path to Independence,” which will add accessibility to the grounds for a new demographic. “The Path to

Independence’ will travel through the entire property and enable people in wheelchairs or scooters to access every one of our buildings, including the petting zoo and the greenhouses,” she described. “I can picture it, and [it] will be simply wonderful.”

Burney’s eyes lit up as she discussed her goal to begin an intergenerational program where teenagers and senior citizens meet together at the farm. “It’s a big heartbeat of mine that this will happen. I visualize teenagers who are struggling with anxiety and depression pushing surrogate grandparents from lonely and isolated living situations through the grounds and sharing their stories with each other. Intergenerational healing through telling stories,” Burney said. “They can learn from each other and lift each other’s spirits, as each population has something valuable to offer the other. It’s healing on both ends.”

Burney’s positivity and optimism are contagious and two of the many reasons behind Allaire Community Farm’s success. “To have happiness and joy, you have to have a purpose in life. And you cannot experience pure joy without helping someone in some way, shape, or form,” she said. “The farm brings goodness to people, especially to the forgotten populations of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, special-needs, at-risk, and seniors. We do what we can to help, and the joy, it just flows.” ♦



*Nigerian Dwarf goats.*

Jill Ocone

*Allaire Community Farm is located at 1923 Baileys Corner Road in Wall Township. The farm, petting zoo, and farm market are open Tues. - Sat. 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM and Sun. 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM. For more information, call (732) 796-3298 or visit [www.allairecommunityfarm.org](http://www.allairecommunityfarm.org). Visit the Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/AllaireCommunityFarm](http://www.facebook.com/AllaireCommunityFarm) for daily postings and operating updates, including weather-related closures and information.*

*Allaire Community Farm welcomes donations and volunteers to support its initiatives and mission of nurturing through nature. To learn more, to volunteer, or to make a donation, visit their website.*