

# Circle Sanctuary

## *Annual Report: Samhain 2012- 2013*



# *A Letter from Selena Fox*

Dear Friends,

This Samhain Circle Sanctuary celebrates thirty years on our beautiful sacred land, nestled in the rolling hills of Southwestern Wisconsin. As Samhain is a 'threshold' moment, I find myself looking back at how far we have come in these past three decades and looking forward to the decades to come.

Fourty years ago Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve was just a dream, a vision and a hope. We dreamed of having a place where people could come together season after season, year after year, and build a sustaining spiritual community. We had a vision of a place where people could develop a deep relationship with the natural world - a relationship not at the mercy of prying eyes or park usage rules. We hoped that it could be a place where Pagans from many paths could come and feel truly at home. It took years of effort, countless volunteer hours and the generosity of our wonderful community - but today, those wishes have come true. I am so intensely thankful for everyone who has put energy and love into this land over the years.

It is just tremendous to contemplate how far we have come in thirty years, but we are not content to rest on our laurels. This past year Circle Sanctuary built upon the successes of the past to help grow in new and exciting ways.

Some of the changes are visible just when you walk around the Nature Preserve. New trails have been made, opening pathways to majestic vistas and beautiful groves. Overgrown brush has been cleared and in its place wildflowers bloom, attracting a splendor of butterflies and other wildlife. Our old farmhouse is sporting a new roof and handsome new deck. Up in the barn, our bookshop has a new look and offers tantalizing new goodies each festival.

Other changes are more subtle, but have made a tremendous difference in the life of our organization. Our office welcomed two energetic new staff members, and trained several new volunteers and event coordinators. All together they have brought new vigor to both our events and many of our most critical programs, including our magazine, Lady Liberty League and our work with social media. This year we dramatically increased Circle Sanctuary's presence at Pagan Pride Days, and it has truly been a pleasure to see so many people who have connected with Circle Sanctuary over the years and across the country. Our strategic planning process has included more voices, coming together to contribute passion and ideas to chart the course that Circle Sanctuary can follow for years to come.

And so, at this Samhain time, I can unhesitatingly say that I am looking forward to the new year. I look ahead to a year where we can build on the progress of the past and realize new dreams. My vision is for a year in which this sacred land can become a spiritual home to even more people while finding new ways for those already here to deepen their connection with the spirits of this magical place and learn more of the secrets that it teaches.

I invite you to join me as I give thanks for all the blessings that have come over the decades gone by, and raise a toast to the ones that have yet to come.

Blessed Be,

*Selena Fox*

Senior Minister & Executive Director  
Circle Sanctuary



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# Featured Program: CIRCLE Magazine

Since the very beginning, Circle Sanctuary has been committed to providing educational resources and a connection to a spiritual community to Pagans and other Nature Spirituality Practitioners. Beginning in 1979, *CIRCLE Magazine* (then called *Circle Network News*) has delivered inspiration, education and news to members of the Pagan and Nature Spirituality community.

For many years *CIRCLE Magazine* has been run by a volunteer editor, but with changing media demands it became clear that the magazine needed more time than a volunteer position could provide. At the beginning of 2013, long-time volunteer editor Georgette Paxton helped train and hand over the production of *CIRCLE Magazine* to our new staff editor, Florence Edwards-Miller. This past year *CIRCLE Magazine* published issues with forum topics on Urban Magic, Shamanic Voices and Home & Harvest. The magazine is now available both in print and (for the first time) digital subscriptions at [www.circlesanctuary.org/store](http://www.circlesanctuary.org/store).

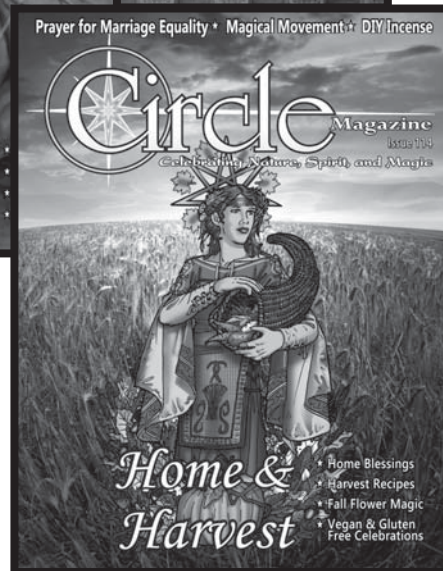
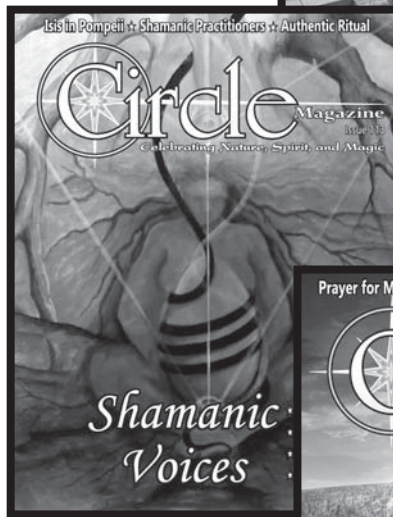
Other changes this year include revised and improved submission guidelines and forms, layout updates, a *CIRCLE Magazine* meet and greet at Pagan Spirit Gathering, new media review procedures, an expanded team of amazing volunteer copy editors and the new *CIRCLE Magazine* Facebook page.

*CIRCLE Magazine* serves the community in many ways:

- **Education:** *CIRCLE Magazine* provides a wealth of knowledge and ideas on topics from connecting with city spirits (Issue 112) to rituals to guard the threshold (Issue 113) to the history of the temple to Isis in Pompeii (Issue 113).
- **New Voices:** Readers can also use the magazine to discover new and exciting authors within the Pagan community. In 2013, contributors to *CIRCLE Magazine* with new books recently released or coming soon

included authors Tess Whitehurst and Shauna Aura Knight and poets Salvatore Marici and Kathryn Hinds.

- **Inspiration:** *CIRCLE Magazine* publishes inspirational material including guided meditations, prayers, invocations and rituals that can be used by groups or solitary practitioners.



- **Art:** Since the very beginning, *CIRCLE Magazine* has featured beautiful Pagan art and illustration. This past year, artists from the US, UK, Canada, France, Russia, Hungary and Italy contributed work to our pages.
- **News:** In our geographically diverse community, it can be difficult to connect and learn what events have transpired that affect us all. Also, news that was significant one moment can be forgotten a week later. *CIRCLE Magazine* regularly publishes accounts of significant events, such as the Mother Earth Water Walk (Issue 112) or Pagan participation at the Supreme Court rally for marriage equality (Issue 114). Additionally the Lady Liberty League Report provides the community with updates on significant cases or issues in the ongoing struggle for Pagan civil liberties and religious freedom.

- **Community:** Though geographically dispersed, ours is a community that comes together to celebrate moments of joy as well as to support each other in times of grief. *CIRCLE Magazine's* "Passages" section publishes announcements of births, rites of passage, weddings & handfastings and obituaries of both community members and animal companions. Each issue also begins with "Around Circle Sanctuary," which serves as a newsletter and chronicle of the significant events in the life of Circle Sanctuary.

## Featured Program: the Lady Liberty League



### Lady Liberty League

As part of a minority religious community, Pagans and Nature Spirituality practitioners have too often faced challenges to our right to practice our religion in peace and harmony. The

Lady Liberty League (LLL) was founded by Selena Fox and others to respond when those challenges arise.

The Lady Liberty League is a program organized and sponsored by Circle Sanctuary that coordinates volunteers and experts from many Pagan paths to respond to situations that threaten our religious freedom or civil liberties. LLL also works to promote fair and accurate depictions of Pagans within the media and to promote religious tolerance for all. This year long-time Pagan Spirit Gathering community member Minerva was added as a volunteer Lady Liberty League Case Manager and staff member Florence is now also assisting with communications.

#### LLL responded to several situations this past year:

- Buncombe County, North Carolina - LLL supported a local family who faced opposition to their objections to the distribution of Gideon Bibles at the local middle school. LLL coordinated with local Pagans to provide support to the family and education to the school board which ultimately resulted in new policies to end discrimination and promote religious freedom within the school system.
- New Port Richey, Florida - LLL supported Pagan children's book author Kyrja Withers, (pictured below) after her home and family were targets of anti-Pagan harassment. LLL assisted local law enforcement to help protect the family and install a conspicuous security presence to discourage further attacks.



Pagan author Kyrja Withers with LLL activist Peter Dybing in front of her home in Florida, *photo from Peter Dybing*

- On February 17, 2013 a nationally broadcast Fox & Friends television segment featured multiple inaccurate and offensive comments about Wiccans and Pagans in a story about new, inclusive religious policies at the University of Missouri. LLL and other organizations released statements providing correction and calling for the Fox commentators to apologize. Selena Fox released a statement as director of LLL and was in direct contact with senior officials at Fox to express our community's displeasure. Several days later the Fox commentator apologized on the air.



The Fahrenheit 360 Burn Team at the successful and peaceful Pahoee Summer Solstice Festival, *photo by Mead Muse*

- Pahoee, Florida - LLL assisted the organizers of a new Summer Solstice festival, after news broke that several evangelical Christians objected to the festival at a public meeting. LLL coordinated to support the festival organizers and counteract the fear and misunderstanding within the community. LLL volunteer Peter Dybing spoke at a prayer meeting to calm fears about the festival and promote understanding about our religion. As a result, the festival took place smoothly.
- In August 2013, LLL was made aware of several Facebook pages calling for violence against 'witches.' LLL coordinated with the Covenant of the Goddess (CoG) to devise a strategy to address the pages and to educate the Pagan community about the continuing problem of 'witch' hunting in Africa. While no one is under any illusions that this kind of hate speech can be eliminated, LLL and CoG continue to coordinate and to partner with the South African Pagan Rights Alliance to support worldwide efforts to eliminate persecution in the name of religion.

## *Featured Program: Supporting Sacred Habitats*

Circle Sanctuary (Circle) is based on nearly 200 acres of beautiful land and includes oak forests, remnant prairie, wetland, a spring-fed stream, majestic rock outcroppings and a complex biological community. Once part of a rolling prairie and savannah ecosystem, human intervention, including farming and fire suppression, drastically impacted the species that call this sacred land 'home.'

This year, as we commemorated 30 years of Circle Sanctuary on this sacred land, we launched a new initiative to expand the active restoration of native ecologies and make Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve a better home, both for the many species that live on this land and for the Pagans from many paths who consider Circle Sanctuary to be a spiritual home.

While thick snow was still on the ground, the Nature Preserve committee met to consider the many demands on Circle Sanctuary's land and created a flexible plan to help direct restoration efforts in the seasons and years to come. The plan was designed to be flexible and to take into account both human and nonhuman habitat needs.

One key component to restoration work at Circle Sanctuary is the careful use of prescribed fire. Circle's land is part of a high-fire ecology - and reintroducing fire to the landscape helps burn away many invasive species and encourage a diversity of plant life that promotes a healthy habitat for other creatures. This spring, Circle Minister Bob Paxton and Circle staff member Florence Edwards-Miller attended fire training offered by the International Crane Foundation. Circle Sanctuary was also honored to receive much of the burn gear owned by long-time volunteer and Nature Preserve Committee member Dennis Presser, who passed away in February. Dennis was a vital voice in guiding the restoration work at

Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve and his vision has continued to guide the committee.

This past spring and summer volunteers worked to remove invasive species and clear brush. The area above Circle's barn was cleared of thorn bushes and is already being used as additional camping space during festivals. Several new trails were established and opened up previously difficult to access portions of the land to visitors. The trails will also double as firebreaks for future controlled burns.

The winged creatures of Circle Sanctuary received particular attention this year. At Imbolc, Laurie Blue Heron gave a presentation on bee keeping to a packed audience. Jennifer Redell of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources came to our Earth Day gathering and gave a presentation on Wisconsin's bats and the important role they play in the environment. In the spring, Circle Sanctuary participated in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon, counting as many bird species as possible in one day to raise money and awareness for bird conservation.

The land is home to many species of cavity-nesting birds, including bluebirds, and this year we expanded the number of nest boxes. An expanded network of bird feeders also help the community deepen our connection with the creatures who share our sacred space. All of the data from bird watching on the land is filed with eBird, which uses field observations to monitor bird population changes and health.

As a church rooted in sacred land, Circle Sanctuary understands that our relationship with the land is reciprocal. If we support a healthy ecosystem then the land will support us. If we sustain the spirit of the land, then we too will be sustained. And together, we will all thrive.



Birdwatching at the Earth Day Festival



Volunteers Richard and Bob tackle invasive brush on a land stewards worknight.



Reed directs volunteers on a controlled burn.  
*Photos by Selena Fox & Bob Paxton.*

# *Samhain 2012 - Samhain 2013*

## *Highlights of the Year in the Circle Sanctuary Community*

In November the Circle Sanctuary (also known as Circle) farmhouse got a badly-needed new roof. A leaking porch was also removed to create a comfortable deck and the summer kitchen was rewired. These projects were made possible by the generosity of several fantastic donors.

The Circle Office was staffed this year by several talented community members who coordinated to expand and improve Circle's programs and operations. New staff members include Florence and Blodie.

New volunteers have joined the teams making Circle events possible. Meghan Doran coordinated a healing-themed Imbolc festival, which was one of Circle's best-attended one-day festivals in years. Cheri Haram coordinated a marvelous 'Bees & Balance' themed Ostara. Brad Allen proved particularly gifted coordinating the "PSG Truck Loading Tetris" at Welcome Summer. Volunteers continue to be critical to every aspect of Circle's success, and in the coming year we hope to expand opportunities for volunteer involvement.

Circle's resource shop got a 'makeover' and was expanded with new and improved inventory, thanks to the hard work of Blodie and a team of volunteers. Proceeds from the "Owl's Nest" store benefit Circle's programs.

The Strategic Planning committee expanded its work to include several community-staffed groups addressing critical areas of Circle's life and operations, including the Cemetery, Events and the Nature Preserve.

A new and improved curriculum for Circle Sanctuary Minister training was implemented this winter. Already several new applicants have been accepted and have begun the long process to develop their skills as leaders within our community.

To expand access to service members around the country and the globe, the Circle Military Ministries team launched internet radio awards shows for the popular Pagan Military Service Ribbon. In-person awards have been conducted by Circle Sanctuary Ministers at events around the country.

This year Lady Liberty League addressed issues including job discrimination, harassment, media defamation, and helped to promote positive images of Pagans worldwide.

Several Circle Ministers participated in services and demonstrations in support of marriage equality on the steps of the US Supreme Court in Washington D.C..

This year's Pagan Spirit Gathering, held at the newly renamed Stonehouse Farm, was a major success and broke records for attendees. Special guests this year included Amber K and Azrael Arynn K.

Circle Sanctuary participated for the first time in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Nelson Institute Earth Day.

As part of Circle Sanctuary's ongoing efforts to promote religious access for incarcerated Pagans, Selena Fox delivered a special presentation on accommodating religious diversity to ninety chaplains at the National Corrections Academy in Colorado.

In the spring, an internment service and veteran's headstone placement were held for long-time Circle community member Captian Dennis Presser at Circle Cemetery's veteran's ridge. In the fall, Peggy Hall became the third

adult to receive full body natural burial at Circle Cemetery. Staff and volunteers continue to work to develop long-term plans to keep improving the way that the Cemetery can support and serve the community.

Following damage from fallen trees last fall, Circle Sanctuary's beloved Fairy Shrine was relocated to a more accessible location on the hill above the barn. A rededication ceremony was held at Green Spirit to invite the spirits to connect with this new sacred site.

Circle Sanctuary was at Pagan Pride events in Northern Illinois, Minneapolis, Chicago, Madison, Louisville, New Orleans, Northern Virginia, Indianapolis, New Jersey and Eastern Iowa this year.

To learn more about the programs and activities of Circle Sanctuary, visit [www.circlesanctuary.org](http://www.circlesanctuary.org) or connect on Facebook to the *CircleSanctuaryCommunity*.

Blessed Be!

### *Samhain 2012-2013 Circle Sanctuary Events:*

*Samhain:* October 26-28

*Interfaith Open House:* December 8

*Winter Solstice Pageant:* December 21

*Imbolc:* February 2

*Welcome Spring:* March 23

*Spring Community Weekend:* April 13-14

*Earth Day:* April 20

*Beltane:* May 3-5

*Spring Sacred Fire Circle:* May 17-19

*Welcome Summer:* June 8

*Pagan Spirit Gathering:* June 16-23

*Green Spirit:* August 2-4

*Fall Sacred Fire Circle:* August 30-  
September 1

*Welcome Fall:* September 21

*Fall Community Weekend:* October 12-13

*Six Sanctuary Days (Volunteer Workdays)  
Thirteen Full Moon Circles*

# Circle Sanctuary, Inc. 2012 Financial Summary

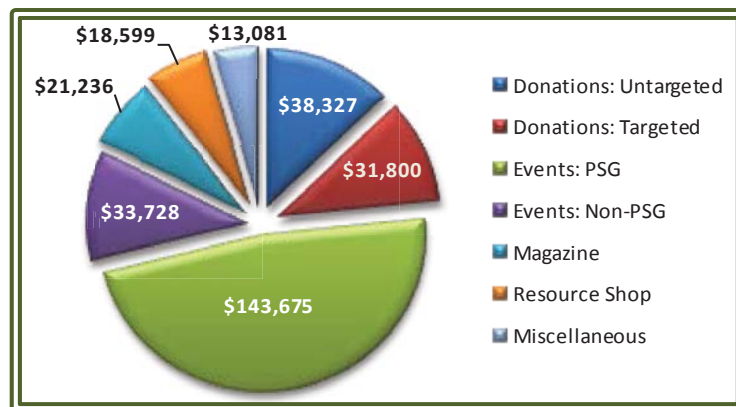
## INCOME

The majority of Circle Sanctuary's income in 2012 came from three sources: **Donations** (23%), **Contributions** (13%) related to CIRCLE Magazine and the Resource Shop, and **Event Registrations** (59%).

In 2012, Circle Sanctuary brought in a total of **\$300,446**, which is an increase of **3.9%** over 2011.

Donations are divided into:

- **Untargeted:** funds given for general Circle use, and raffle/silent auction proceeds
- **Targeted:** funds given for specific purposes. Targeted donations in 2012 were higher than usual, owing to the final push to finish the Farmhouse Roof Replacement project.

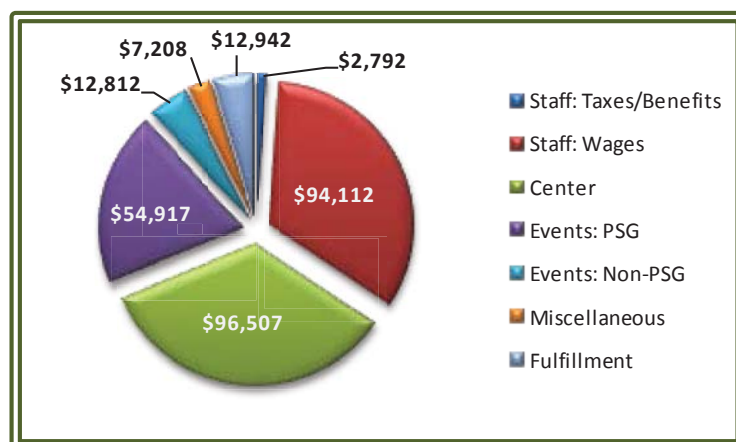


## EXPENSES

In 2012, Circle spent a total of **\$281,290**, which is an increase of **4.5%** over 2011 -- leaving a surplus of **\$19,156**. As has been true for many years, *Circle Sanctuary carries no debt*.

Most of Circle's expenses went into four areas:

- **Fulfillment** (5%): Stocking the Resource Shop and printing & mailing CIRCLE Magazine.
- **Center** (34%): Day-to-day operation of Circle Sanctuary's office and facilities, including utilities, office supplies, equipment leases, bank & merchant fees, buildings & grounds maintenance, insurance and property taxes. In 2012, Center expenses were higher than usual owing to the completion of the Farmhouse Roof Replacement project, as well as the acquisition of a used tractor.
- **Events** (24%): expenses of running festivals and other events organized by Circle Sanctuary, including PSG.
- **Staff** (34%): Wages, taxes and benefits associated with the 5 staff members employed in 2012.



## NOTEWORTHY FIGURES

- **Pagan Spirit Gathering (PSG)** is Circle Sanctuary's largest single revenue source, providing 41% of revenue.
- **CIRCLE Magazine** published 1 issue in 2012 at a profit of \$12,989. The Magazine was reorganized in early 2013, and has been running on schedule ever since.
- From 2011 to 2012, **Non-Targeted Donations** decreased by 14.4%. A Fundraising Committee was formed after Samhain 2012, and has been analyzing donor patterns & fundraising methods.
- Circle paid \$15,613 in **Property Taxes**. We are examining strategies to reduce this tax load, but will not be able to eliminate it outright – as a church, we can only exempt the buildings + 30 acres from tax, and we own 200 acres.
- **Credit Card Merchant Fees** cost Circle \$6224 in 2012.
- If one considers only Staff and Center expenses, Circle requires **\$464/day** to finance operations at current levels. By contrast, **Donations** that aren't targeted for a specific purpose came in at a rate of **\$105/day**. Circle is still dependent on a “fee for service” model, where events like PSG are critical ways of funding year-round operations.

*Celebrating 39 Years of Community, Spirit, and Magic*

