



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

INLAND SEAS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



Our Mission

Inspire a lifetime of Great Lakes curiosity, stewardship, and passion in people of all ages.



Throughout 2023, our guiding theme was “An Educational Alliance.” Not only because “Alliance” is the name of the newest Great Lakes Schoolship, but also because of the educational alliances we’ve built across the Great Lakes that necessitated the purchase of an additional ship.

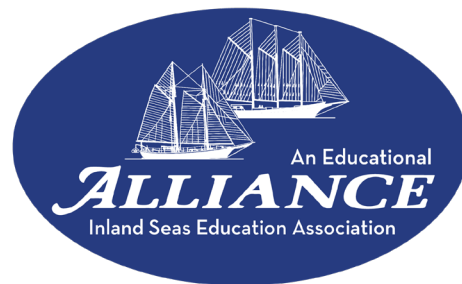
After 35 years and over 165,000 students, Inland Seas Education Association is widely recognized as a key leader in Great Lakes education. 2023 marked the beginning of an organizational expansion focused on ensuring that students throughout the entire Great Lakes Basin have the opportunity to experience the awe-inspiring programs we provide on the water and in local watersheds. The horizon for ISEA stretches far and wide and the opportunity to capture the hearts and minds of this and future

generations has never been stronger. Therefore, along with a new ship, 2023 also meant expanding staff, volunteers, programs, and financial resources so that we can continue leading this important work into the future.

As a supporter of ISEA, you are a part of our educational alliance. The program partners that bring our ships to communities throughout the Great Lakes, the teachers and students that attend programs, the volunteers that support our work with their time and talents, as well as our financial supporters all together make our work possible. Thanks to your generosity, ISEA has been able to meet the growing demand for our work and strengthen our role as a leader in Great Lakes education.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred Sitkins".

Fred Sitkins | ISEA Executive Director



“The reason there are astronauts, oceanographers, limnologists and other scientists is because of programs like [Inland Seas].” - ISEA Teacher

2023 Highlights

- 🚤 Arrival of schooner *Alliance* to Suttons Bay in July
- 🚤 19 teachers attended the Great Lakes Watershed Field Course, which has now had participants from all eight Great Lakes states
- 🚤 Hired two new full-time staff
- 🚤 Expanded Chicago programs to include day programs and two 5-day overnights
- 🚤 Conducted Fall Schoolship in Detroit and Suttons Bay simultaneously
- 🚤 Expanded Watershed Exploration programs including a local partner day camp
- 🚤 Introduced a new “Great Lakes Challenge” station on Schoolship programs

ISEA Staff



Back Row (L to R): Ben Hale, Izzy Cooper, Juliana Lisuk, Fred Sitkins, Liam Fries, Harrison Fischer
Front Row (L to R): Kate Jarvi, Rachel Ratliff, Lily Heyns, Trisha Smrecak
Not Pictured: Rebecca Sisco

Alliance's First Season

Transit:

In the afternoon of June 16, 2023 schooner *Alliance* slipped away from her dock in Georgetown, Maryland bound for the Great Lakes. The journey would take her roughly 3,000 miles stopping six times along the way to swap crew, refit, and refuel. In total 14 volunteers and 12 crew members made the trip possible. On July 14th schooner *Alliance* pulled into her new home port of Suttons Bay, MI to begin her life as a Great Lakes Schoolship. She was greeted by a crowd of 300 people, excited to meet the Great Lakes' newest ally.

First programs:

After *Alliance's* arrival, the volunteer crew set to work familiarizing themselves with the ship, practicing drills, and getting ready for public sails. ISEA enjoyed one of its busiest summer sailing seasons this year averaging 28 passengers per sail. *Alliance* played host to most of these public programs. In September she sailed to Detroit bringing programs to the Detroit River in partnership with the U of M Detroit River Story Lab. These programs allowed ISEA staff to get comfortable aboard the ship and learn how to best utilize the space available.

Winter Renovations:

After the conclusion of fall Schoolship, ISEA staff and volunteers quickly set to work on renovations aboard *Alliance*. The main project for the '23/'24 winter season is completely remodeling the main cabin area. This space was previously separated into multiple staterooms and, upon completion, will be a common bunk area similar to that of S/V *Inland Seas*. This work will allow us to conduct overnight programs with up to 18 participants.

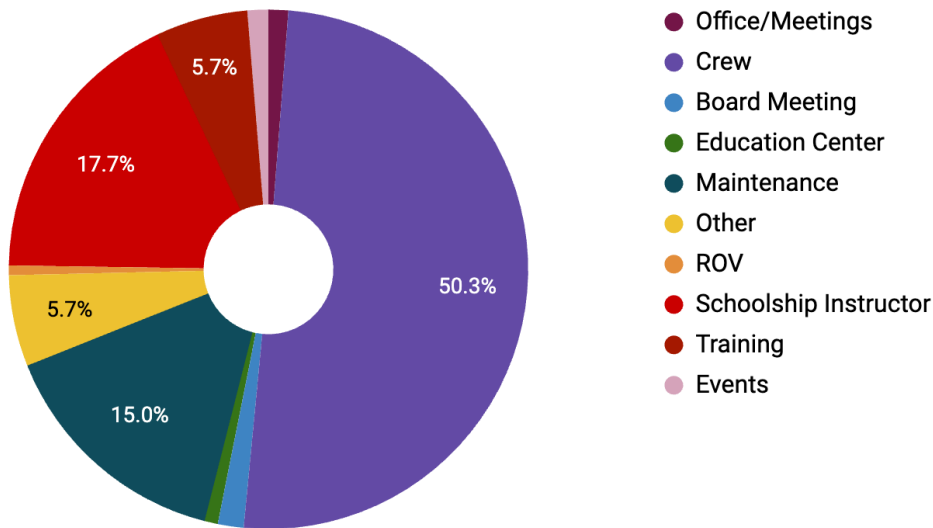


Volunteer Impact

Inland Seas enjoys its long history of success due in large part to the hard work and dedication of its volunteer corps. The years of dedication our volunteers have provided and their passion for the Great Lakes are the foundation of our programs. In 2023, ISEA had **80 active volunteers** who gave **9,126* recorded hours**** toward fostering the next generation of Great Lakes stewards. Of those, 38 were new members.

Volunteer Hour Distribution

Jan - Dec 2023



*As of January 2024

**Actual hours are likely higher, as not all volunteers record hours or turn in time sheets.



Volunteer Award Recipients

Volunteer of the Year: Brad Lyman

Executive Director: Glen Rauth

Friend of ISEA: Kate Thornhill

Education Director: Randy Karfonta

New Volunteer: Jane Packard

Teaching Excellence: Jack Messer

Outstanding Crew: Rob Baier

New Staff Hires

In 2023, ISEA added two full-time staff members to fill much needed positions as we continue to grow as an organization.



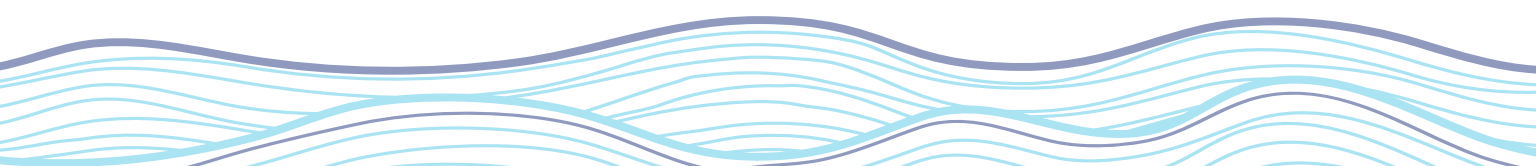
Lily Heyns
- **Captain** -

Lily embarked on her sailing career in 2009, starting out as a deckhand aboard a Windjammer in Maine. During her early years, she sailed as far as Greenland and Puerto Rico. In 2013, seeking new adventures, she made her way to Traverse City to explore sailing on the Great Lakes, discovering a love for freshwater sailing. Introduced to Inland Seas during the Spring Schoolship season of 2013 while working for schooner *Manitou*, Lily found it to be the highlight of the *Manitou* schedule. In 2018, Lily joined ISEA as a relief captain for their programs aboard schooner *Inland Seas*. With the growth of ISEA programming and the acquisition of schooner *Alliance*, Lily officially became the second full-time captain in early 2023. When ashore, you can find Lily on walks around her property with her dog and cat, baking, and gardening.



Liam Fries
- **Great Lakes Educator** -

Liam joined the ISEA team in April of 2023. Originally from Clarkston MI, Liam spent many summers growing up on Lake Huron near Cedarville, MI, where he learned how to sail and navigate the Les Cheneaux Islands' unique waterways. Liam attended college in Kalamazoo, MI at Kalamazoo College. He graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in Biology and German. Prior to joining ISEA, Liam worked alongside the Michigan DNR and local nonprofit, Grass River Natural Area, in outdoor education and wildlife monitoring. Outside of the office, Liam loves to hike, bike, kayak, and sail. Liam also is an avid birder and will routinely stop along trails to work on his native plant ID skills.



2023 by the Numbers

6,776
Participants

293
Programs

5
Away
Ports

11
Full-Time
Staff

9,126
Volunteer
Hours
Recorded

80
Active
Volunteers

7
Interns

6
Professional
Development
Opportunities
Offered

2
New
Full-Time
Staff

1
Freshwater
Jellyfish
Found

1
New
Schooner

593
Household
Donations

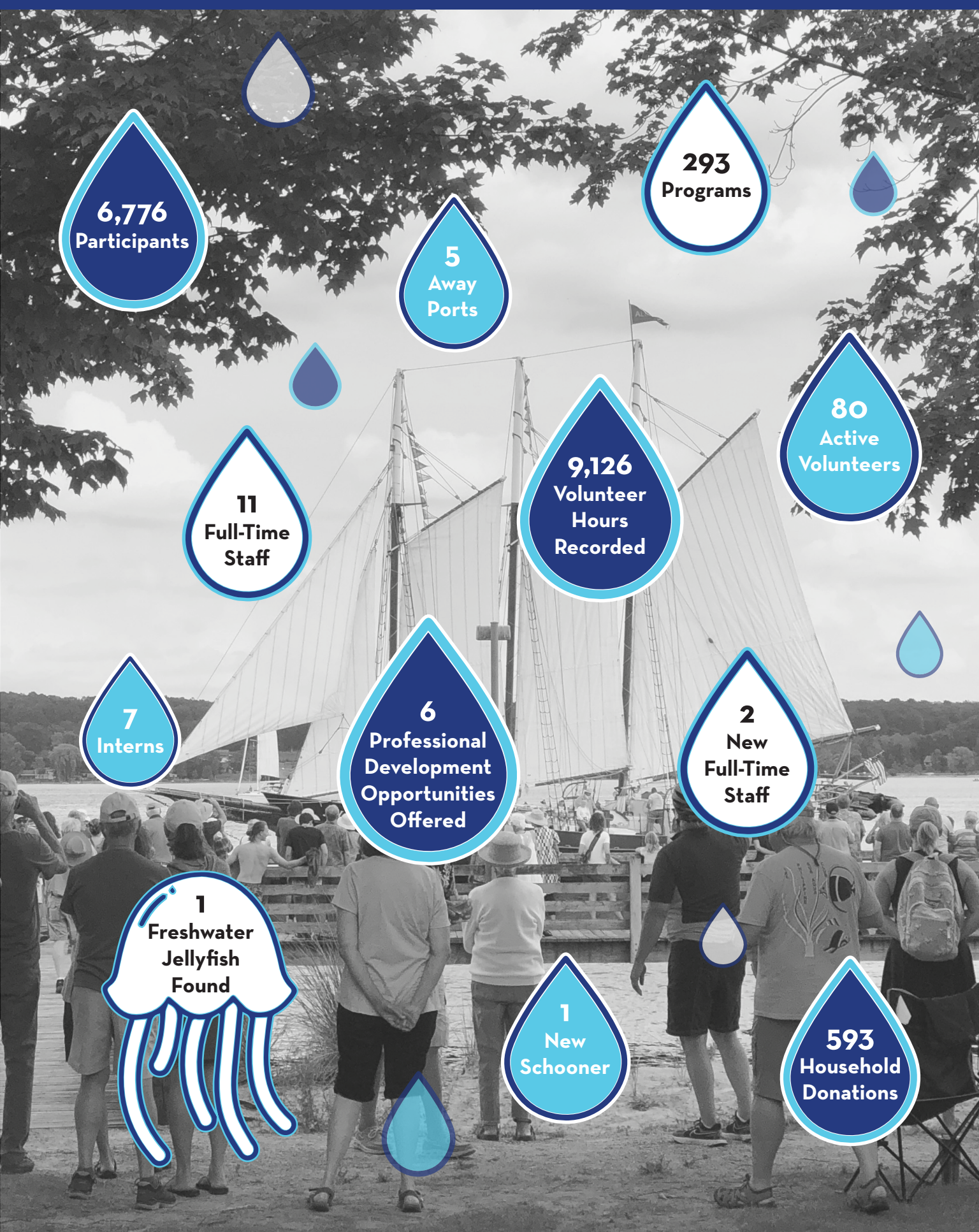


Photo Gallery



Spring Schoolship aboard *Inland Seas*



Remotely Operated Vehicle Program



Watershed Exploration Day Camp



Inland Seas Winter Haul Out



Collecting a Benthos Sample



2023 Watershed Field Course



Navigating the Detroit River



Spring Remotely Operated Vehicle



Dissect the Watershed Program



2023 Donor Appreciation Dinner



Interns Furling the Jib



Inspecting the Fish Catch



Teacher Professional Development Opportunities with ISEA

The Great Lakes Watershed Field Course (GLWFC) ran for the fifth time in August 2023 with 19 teacher participants from across the Great Lakes region. We continue to receive positive feedback from teachers about this professional development opportunity, as it offers a network of like-minded educators and helps teachers develop skills in watershed education. ISEA also facilitated nine online small group opportunities for the GLWFC educator community throughout the fall and obtained continuing education credits for the first time for these year-round events. The value of the program is growing for educators, who now receive more credits, and opportunities to bring their students back to our year-round programs. Participants have also become some of our biggest allies and advocates as they share our work with others across the Great Lakes.

ISEA was awarded a contract from the State of Michigan in 2023 to train our staff in Michigan Environmental Education Curriculum Support (MEECS) lessons and facilitate MEECS-focused educator professional learning experiences. ISEA facilitated six trainings for educators in 2023, reaching 86 participants. This was an important step in expanding educator relationships and community partnerships. This opportunity also strengthened ISEA's position as a regional leader in watershed education by building our relationship with the State of Michigan's environmental education program staff.

2023 Blog Highlights

“After a month and a half of getting paid to scoop up mud with kids, I found comfort in the non-routine routines of day sails. Different kids every day meant learning to be adaptable in the face of all types of weather, group dynamics, and learning styles. I loved the challenge, taking bits and pieces of my best experiences and molding them into a teaching style. Above all, I realized how much I valued sharing conversations with the students.”

- **Meghan Wysocki, Great Lakes Waterways Intern**

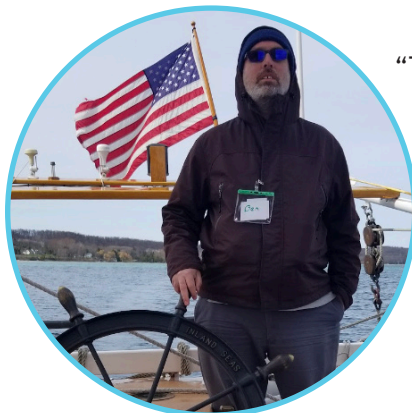


“I can say that the GLWFC has made me a better teacher. I even came up with an idea for a PD of my own that I’ll try to present to my district this fall. So, if you’re looking for one more opportunity to get some PD in before the summer ends, apply for next year’s field course.”

-**Scot Martin, GLWFC Participant**

“I pored over the ship documents, practiced knots, learned port from starboard and main from mizzen. Finally, I showed up at the dock and went on board *Inland Seas* for the first time. What had, in my initial inquiry into ISEA, seemed like a bit of an afterthought, the namesake vessel quickly and clearly became the beating heart of the organization for me. *Inland Seas* is central to the mission, she’s the steward-ship that conveys the future of the Great Lakes, and I, pardon the expression, got hooked.”

- **Phil Diller, ISEA Volunteer**



“These days, we all need a little hope. And, we need connection. If we’re going to have any chance of a future on this earth, we’re going to have to love her much better than we have been. I’m grateful for all the ways ISEA gives hope, connection, and the inspiration to love the Great Lakes better... all while sailing aboard a majestic vessel. And, I’m so excited to be a part of it. I definitely call it joy!”

-**Ben Larson-Wolbrink, ISEA Volunteer**

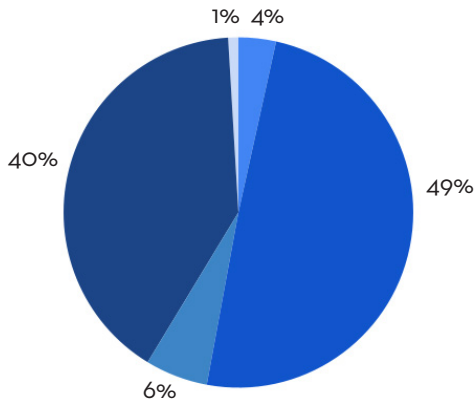
To read full blog posts, please visit our website at schoolship.org/schoolship-blog

Financial Impact

“I see the funds I donate being put to good use. I see an annual report that I can review and see how much of the money actually goes into the program.”

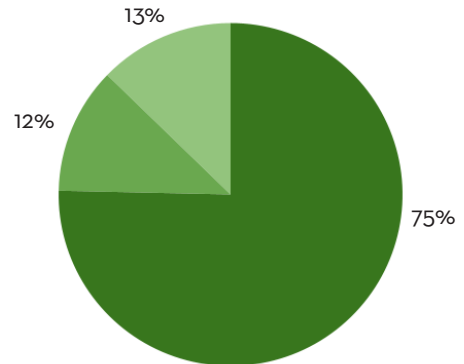
-Ken Cerny

Total Revenue \$3,985,910



- In-Kind Donations
 - Grants and Contracts
 - Program Fees
 - Contributions*
 - Other
- *This includes pledges in 2023 toward future expenditures.

Total Expenses \$1,970,405



- Program Services
- Fundraising
- General and Administrative

Donor Impact

Our ability to inspire Great Lakes curiosity, stewardship, and passion would not be possible without the continued support of our donors. We appreciate the trust in stewarding your resources to provide Great Lakes education for all.

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Inland Seas

EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

100 Dame Street #218
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Inland Seas Education Association 2023 Annual Report

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