

CPC Board of Director Election 2023

Statements of Candidacy

Benny Brewer

Elected Incumbent 2022-2023

I have served on the board as an alternate and now as a full member and am an active leader in many Circle Pines events. I have worked at Summer Camp for years, directed the Folk Opera, and revived and organized the Winter Camp program at CPC in 2021 and 2022. I also wrote a handbook documenting this process for future Winter Camp organizers, so the institution may last after I'm gone. I have been coming to CPC since 2004, when my mother brought me as a little kid to Maple Syrup weekend.

I would like to continue to be on the board so that I may provide a perspective from the younger generation and bring more of my peers and those younger than me into the fold. I believe there is a gap between the older and younger generations at Circle Pines which can be bridged if we reach out to each other, and I have made steps in that direction, like working with Deb Olson to introduce The Legacy Project at Winter Camp. Here, campers interviewed older Circle Piners to learn about the names, faces, and history of this place. Likewise, I would like to work to expedite and reform communication and institutional knowledge between all parties, as I have found that is always a trait which is lacking at CPC, and the board is no exception, having a bit of a scatter-brained nature at times.

I believe the board should be a transparent body that works with its members to accomplish goals related to Circle Pines' mission, and to maintain the health and well-being of this institution. Transparency is critical in this regard, for if the members and committees are not well-informed, due to a board that is too concerned with optics to be honest, it cannot be expected for them to make positive or rational decisions for Circle Pines. On the board, I will not make decisions based on what I think looks good, but what I believe is good for CPC.

As stated above, I believe there is a generational gap at Circle Pines, which can be bridged, if we care to do so. I am not the only one doing this, but I have contributed, working with Deb Olson to create the Legacy Project. Campers as young as 13 met with Tom VanHammen, and Amy and Joe Likover, over a two-day period. Tom came in person and shared stories for hours in the library, and a generation of campers who may have never even met Tom were then given a look into the deep history which

exists at Circle Pines. I believe this will leave a lasting positive impact for Circle Pines, as the community and history is kept alive between generations, and younger folks feel a deeper connection and inclusion within the ongoing story of Circle Pines. This is the kind of attitude I would bring to the board when it comes to inclusion.

I also believe that class or income should have no bearing on participation at CPC, and made sure all campers at winter camp were given scholarship money if requested. I would operate with this mentality on the board as well.

I cannot speak to inclusion as well on behalf of things like race and gender, and I believe it's my responsibility to be transparent about that, but would do my best to work with and listen to those that have more experience in this area. I do not believe that anyone should be disadvantaged or discriminated against at CPC due to their race or gender, and I hope that should go without saying for all members.

Having worked at Summer Camp since 2018, and Winter Camp since 2021, I have much experience in programming and leadership roles. Reviving and organizing Winter Camp taught me much in the way of communication and outreach, having to connect with and recruit a select group of campers for the event. And as an individual, I have done private tutoring in music, and had to develop lesson plans.

Deborah Olson

Elected Incumbent: 2010-2012, 2012-2015, 2015-2018, 2019-2023

The role of the board is to move forward CPC's mission and vision while supporting the ED and staff in dealing with the constant pressure of keeping the organization viable. I provide CPC institutional history, legal, business and organizing knowledge to the board. I chair the fundraising committee and have been active in raising funds for CPC for many years. For long-term sustainability, strengthening its mission and continuing its relevance, CPC needs to creatively use its resources to improve its self-sufficiency and diversify its programming.

Create more programming like Spanish Immersion and involvement with organizations such as ERRACE. Create programs highlighting the work of our indigenous members and staff including inviting others to become allies. Ask the families of our scholarship recipients to do outreach for CPC at their churches and neighborhood organizations.

I have been founder and executive director of 6 non-profits for which I organized volunteers and raised funds to support staff to carry forward a progressive mission to collectively empower economically disadvantaged and people of color. As an organizer and attorney, I have helped create worker owned companies, including cooperatives, and support organizations to foster them. I am a sociocracy facilitator & have used that skill to help CPC and other organizations improve inclusiveness in their decision-making processes. I led a non-profit organization in Detroit, that I founded, to successfully transfer leadership to people of color. I learned a lot about the issues involved for people from different cultures to work together inclusively, and how I needed to change my behaviors encourage inclusion.

Romy Fitschen

Elected Incumbent: 2020-2023

I have spent the past 30 years dedicating my life to nonprofit and social justice organizations. I have provided service in a multitude of roles including ;director of finance and administration, human resources management; and coordination and development of board, members, and volunteers. My experience includes both governmental and non-governmental environments. I have provided training to other organizations by participating in reconstructing governing boards/committee structures and mentored key leadership positions.

Currently, I work for a state-wide community development financial fund, Opportunity Resource Fund, which provides loans to create equitable, economic, and sustainable opportunities throughout primarily in traditionally red-lined areas of the state of Michigan. My background also includes an extensive history in prevention of domestic and sexual violence. Circle Pines has been home to me and my family for my entire life. I am finishing my first term on the board, having been chair this last year, during two executive director transitions. I have worked to shift board focus on policy making, and committee focus on supporting operational activities in a more cohesive, less individualistic manner. I would like to see the onboarding of our new ED through and believe I have more to contribute with making sure the staff are supported and resources are administered in an efficient and thoughtful way. My strength is not in the program activities but to support those that have those skills.

CPC strives to be a place for all people to come together in cooperation. To be in a diverse environment means challenging ones belief systems and approach people

openly. CPC can be a safe space for many people, but we also need to keep challenging ourselves and each other; in order to do the work to dismantle systemic racism, discrimination, sexism etc. I acknowledge the need to shift our perceptions, interactions, policies, and culture and will personally commit to working on that with myself and integrate those ideals when working with others.

Isabella Friedheim Perez

Former Board Member Elected: 2020-2022

As a previous board member I have increased my knowledge of social outreach and leadership. This knowledge has made it possible to join other Non-profits and learn more about how it functions! In fact, I am now a trip leader for my university and am leading a trip to partner with “Living Positive” in Kenya to aid women with HIV.

I am both Caucasian and Latina and want to continue to foster diversity in the different programs offered at CPC!

Starting this year, I picked up a leadership position at my university where I lead trips around and outside of the country to serve in areas that have been neglected. I have had to network with 4 different Non-profits just this year to set up volunteering trips for students at Illinois State University.

Nelson Brown

I want to be on the Board because Circle Pines plays an important role in encouraging the development of peace, social justice, environmental health and cooperative living. It also provides a sanctuary where people can recharge their energies by cooperating with other people while supporting the larger social goals it supports. I have been involved in Circle Pines since the 1980s, first as a participant in different retreats and as a member since 2014. I believe it is time for me to play a more active role in it. I think I have the life experience and time to help move Circle Pines forward as it faces new challenges.

One way to foster diversity and inclusion at Circle Pines would be to identify the diverse contacts and experiences of our members in their world and to develop ways that could bring these contacts into Circle Pines with programs and experiences relevant to them. The Spanish immersion program is an example of this approach. The Board should

encourage members to disclose people and groups they work with to see what the best way to involve them in the life of Circle Pines would be. Equity can cover a number of challenges. We should try to make both the programs and the activity of Circle Pines as inclusive of all people, especially those who have traditionally been excluded from full and equal participation in the life of our society. One way to do this is to conduct surveys and discussions about whether we are either explicitly or implicitly excluding different people from their full participation in Circle Pines

During the 1970s I helped start a youth movement in East Lansing, the Coalition For Human Survival, that supported women's rights, gay rights, renewable energy, and community alternative institutions to support these needs. I helped found a Lansing Area alternative newspaper, the Joint Issue, to oppose the Vietnam War and to support the rights of people who were excluded from full participation in our society. I was a draft resister refusing to fight in Vietnam. While working in Chicago as a lawyer, I worked to support tenants' rights, leading to a city tenants' bill of rights. I am now on the Board of the Greater Lansing Peace Education Center that works for peace and social justice both domestically and internationally.

Josh Olson

Former Board Member Elected: 1999-2006

CPC provides a place where people who are looking for an open-minded and welcoming community can find it. I found that to be incredibly compelling as a camper (in the 1990s) and a summer camp staff member (in the early 2000s). When I moved to CA, leaving regular visits to CPC behind was one of the biggest disappointments. I've enjoyed helping out with various committees in the last few years and now that my kids are a bit older, I have a bit more time to contribute to CPC. My last term on the Board was more than 15 years ago, and with some additional work (and life) experience, I think that I have some new skills to contribute to the Board. I'd appreciate the opportunity to help CPC grow and thrive.

I think that the key to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in any organization is making sure that the organization is a welcoming place for a diverse set of people. This includes taking a hard look at the cultural habits and organizational structures of the organization and making sure that those are not unintentionally exclusionary. One example from my time at the Oberlin Student Co-operative Association was a long debate over food policy that ultimately led to a number of vegetarian co-ops agreeing to

occasionally serve meat to avoid discouraging students from non-vegetarian backgrounds from joining. Given that I have not been directly involved for a while my first inclination would be to observe the current state of the organization before hastily suggesting solutions. Eventually I would encourage the Board, Membership, Committees, and Staff to look at what parts of our culture and organization are potentially not as welcoming as we would like them to be and think about ways to address those issues. To the extent that this is not already being done, I think we should make sure that our outreach for our events is going to diverse audiences and look for creative ways to solve the transportation limitations that make regular participation at CPC heavily dependent on having reliable access to a car.

4+ years as a camper at CPC, 2 years as a CIT at CPC, 3 years as a summer camp counselor at CPC, 1 year as an Operations Manager at the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association, 6 years on the CPC Board (1999-2006), 15 years of working as an attorney (although in intellectual property law, so not substantively relevant for CPC).

Aaron Carlson

Incumbent and Former Board Member Elected: 2010-2013, 2013-2016, 2022-2023

I live at Circle Pines, and I work locally in healthcare. I was elected as an alternate and am now serving as a board member due to a resignation earlier this year. Currently my role is as treasurer, a role I have just volunteered for. This will be my primary focus for the next year.

Circle Pines works hard to be a place that everyone can feel welcome. In the past decade I have seen the diversity of membership increase, and I am delighted by that. But to create true equity and a feeling of inclusion, I think we will need to see diversity in the board of directors as well. As I create more connections in the community, I will look for people who can help with that.

Prior to working in healthcare, I had a long career in marketing and PR for commercial real estate, where I gained experience with construction, land management, marketing and communications, and PR.