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Better Makers: Robert Redford and Sibylle Szaggars Redford Honored at Smith Nature Symposium & Benefit

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- [BY HALEY YAMADA](#)



Robert Redford; Donna La Pietra and Bill Kurtis, Masters of Ceremonies; and Sibylle Szaggars Redford (Photos by Jennifer Girard.)

On Friday, June 1, Academy Award-winning actor, director, and environmentalist **Robert Redford** and his wife, **Sibylle Szaggars Redford**, a multimedia environmental artist, were honored at Ryerson Woods' [35th Annual Smith Nature Symposium & Benefit](#) at the [Brushwood Center](#). With record-breaking attendance, the event brought in more than \$250,000 for the Brushwood Center. For years the Redfords have been committed to preservation, education, and promoting awareness of the connection we have with the earth.

“Sibylle and I were honored to receive this award at Brushwood Center, a place that provokes thought and provides inspiration to protect our natural world,” says Redford.

A few hours before the main event, “The Way of The Rain — Voice of Hope” made its Chicago-area premiere at the John and Nancy Hughes Theater at the Gorton Community Center in Lake Forest. The interactive performance represented our connection to the planet through nature-inspired art, music, dance, film, light, and spoken word. A highlight of the performance was when Redford simply came to the stage, sat on a stool, and shared a raw, heartfelt word to inspire and deepen the understanding of our physical and spiritual connections to the planet and its challenges. The program was a collaboration between Szaggars Redford, the Artistic Director, and Music Composer **Tim Janis**. The piece was also underwritten by **Nancy Hughes**, the wife of late film director **John Hughes**.



Robert Redford reads during the performance of “The Way of the Rain” at The Nancy and John Hughes Theater, Gorton Center in Lake Forest



“The Way of the Rain” cast: Tim Janis, Composer; Robert Redford; Sibylle Szaggars Redford, Environmental Artist and Artistic Director; Mairead Nesbitt, Celtic Violinist; Laura Dias, actor and singer; Gregory Leon Baird, Managing Director

Following the premiere, the main event, Ryerson Woods’ 35th Annual Smith Nature Symposium & Benefit, was hosted in a beautiful tent located deep within the Ryerson’s 565 acres of preserved woodlands. Guests enjoyed a menu of local, organic, and sustainable foods, a live auction, and an on-stage interview of the Redfords with local TV stars **Bill Kurtis** and **Donna La Pietra**.



Conversation at the Smith Nature Symposium & Benefit: Robert Redford, Sibylle Szaggars Redford, Donna La Pietra and Bill Kurtis

Szaggars Redford's performance of "The Way of the Rain" inspired a new event series at Brushwood Center called "Dear Earth," which was launched July 22. Szaggars Redford's artwork, "Rain Paintings," was also on display at the Brushwood Center through July 15. Forty percent of all the painting sale proceeds benefited Brushwood Center's nature-inspired youth, family, and veteran art programs, including classes, field trips, exhibitions, and art therapy classes. "Rain Paintings" are watercolor pieces representing climate change and the resulting change of rain patterns. She makes these paintings by placing pigment and paper outside while it rains.

Gail Sturm, Brushwood Center board member and chair of the Symposium, says, "Sibylle and Robert are role models to us all. They use their extraordinary talents to educate and inspire people to take action to care for our earth, vital to life's existence."



Robert Redford with A. Gail Sturm, Chair of the Smith Nature Symposium and Board Member of Brushwood Center.

Brushwood Center and those involved with this year's Symposium would like to thank [Abbott](#) and partners, including the [Lake County Forest Preserves](#), for their generous support. Also, a special thanks to all of the individuals who supported the Brushwood Center's programs at the 2018 Smith Nature Symposium & Benefit (find a complete list [online](#).)



Kevin Ogorzalek, Chair, Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods, and his wife, Heather



Sibylle Szaggars Redford and Catherine Game, Executive Director of Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods



Adele Simmons, Gold Sponsor; Eleanor Ranney Mendoza, Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods Board Member; Alison Ranney, Silver Sponsor



Impact: Giving veterans a chance to explore, create, and restore in nature through photography. Brushwood Center supports military veterans through nature-based photography workshops, called At Ease. Brushwood Center partners with the Lovell Veterans Health Care Facility therapy program to bring veterans to Brushwood Center's At Ease program. Research shows that time in nature reduces stress, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and our participants' stories provide further evidence. The simple act of learning how to photograph nature has changed the lives of At Ease participants.



Haley Yamada is a summer intern for the editorial staff at Make It Better. She is currently working toward a journalism degree from Medill at Northwestern University and plans to graduate in June of 2020. Her work has been published in Spoon University Magazine and on the Northwestern News Network. In her free time she enjoys reading, running, and her pug, Odie. Last year, she ran the Chicago Marathon for [Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago](#) and continues to support the organization today.