

## MEET THE WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER'S ENERGY CENTER, LISA AURECCHIA

Lisa Aurecchia, the WRWC's Director of Projects, has been the energy at the center of our work for more than 25 years. Lisa began her work on the Woonasquatucket in 1996, when the idea for WRWC was forming. Now, 25 years later, we have Lisa to thank for the vibrant Greenway and expanding bike path.

A native of Johnston, Rhode Island, Lisa and her childhood friends dreamt of a bike path that would connect them to the wider world. After travel and adventures, she returned home to find that another visionary, our founder Jane Sherman, was building support to transform the Woonasquatucket River from a post-industrial ecological hazard to a healthy ecosystem. Safe alternative transportation routes were part of that vision from the very start. Lisa joined forces with Jane to engage folks in Johnston and Providence to envision the idea of an urban Greenway running along the river.

Lisa talked with community members about their hopes and dreams for their neighborhoods. Bit by bit, year after year, her leadership helped bring the 75-acre Woonasquatucket River Greenway and seven-mile bike path to life. She also led the creation of the River Ranger program, WRWC's flagship paid

Below: Lisa Aurecchia in her element: on two wheels leading folks to new adventures!



Above: Lisa paddling in Waterplace Park, where the Woonasquatucket meets downtown Providence.

job-training program that connects neighborhood youth with full-time professional land and water stewards to improve and maintain the Greenway.

In collaboration with the local creative community, Lisa filled the emerging Woonasquatucket Greenway with art, which she sees as a symbol of our region's creative spirit. "Amazing people exist in Providence, so many artists and community leaders who helped each other make these ideas come to fruition," she notes. "We had so many questions at first. How to get people into these new outdoor spaces? Who could pull in resources? Now the Greenway and the path look like they were always there, but this started as a seat of our pants initiative. We made it happen with the artistic community because people believed in us. This is really about the generosity of the community all along the way."

Recently, an anonymous donor generously gave \$125,000 in honor of Lisa's lifelong commitment to the Woonasquatucket River. Asked what motivated this gift, the donor said, "I have been so inspired by Lisa's vision and persistence. She has truly willed a clean and thriving river, a bike path, and open green space into existence—and all of this has made a whole neighborhood come to life."

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Thank you, Lisa, for 25 years of vision, joy, and leadership. We can't wait to be part of what you do next!