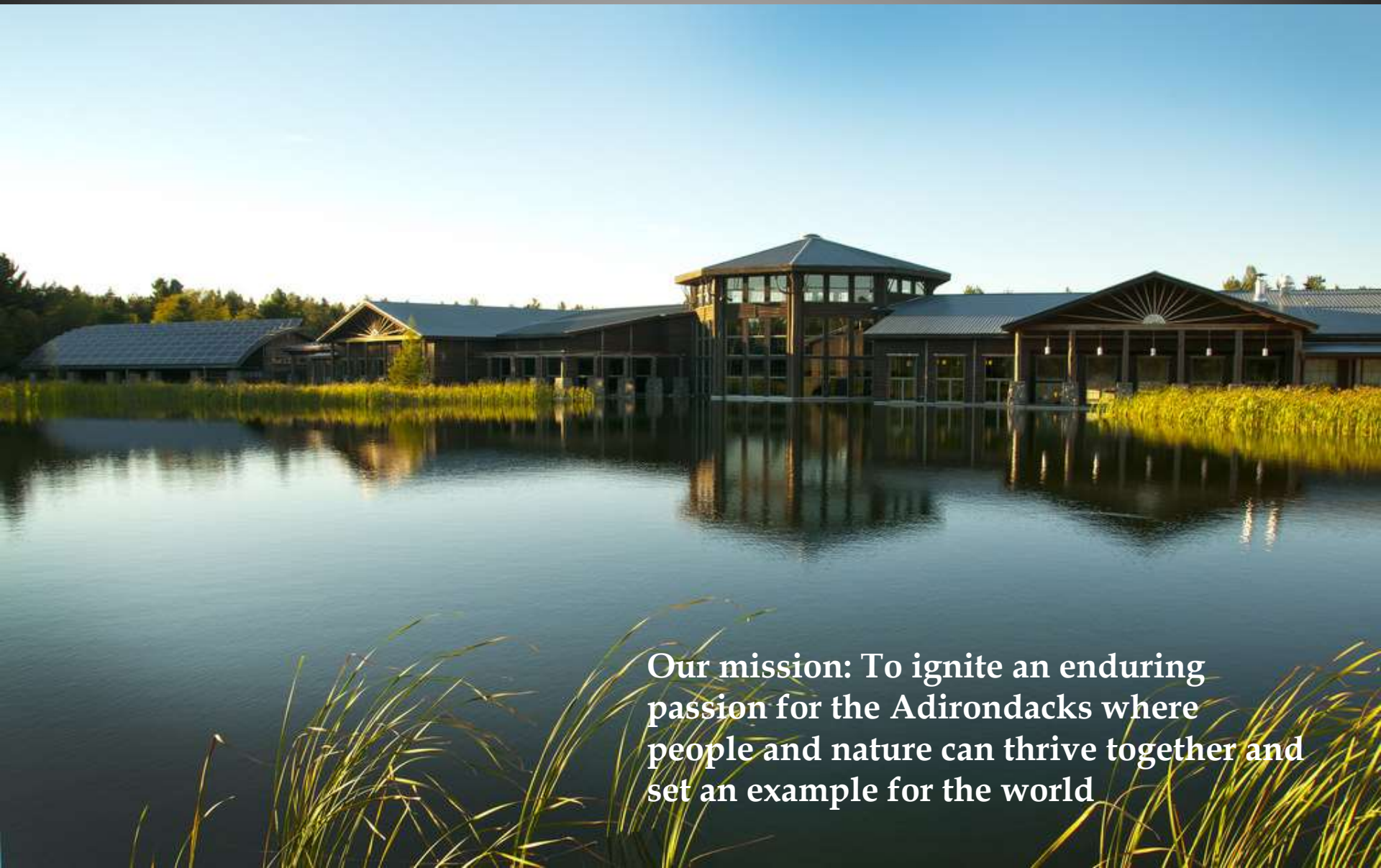
VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS, OH MY!

BUILDING AN EFFICIENT TRAINING PROGRAM THAT INCREASES RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Presented by:
Nick Corcoran
Sue Layton

The Wild Center



Our mission: To ignite an enduring passion for the Adirondacks where people and nature can thrive together and set an example for the world

The Wild Center

- A regional natural history museum in the heart of the Adirondack park in upstate New York
- Opened in 2006
- Planet Adirondack (Science on a Sphere) installed May 2012

Planet Adirondack

- Since Planet Adirondack opened we have had over 600,000 visitors through the museum, many who have experienced SOS.
- Face to face interactions with visitors is the number one way that we connect at The Wild Center
- Using SOS we are able to make those connections by bringing global ideas to the local scale


EXIT

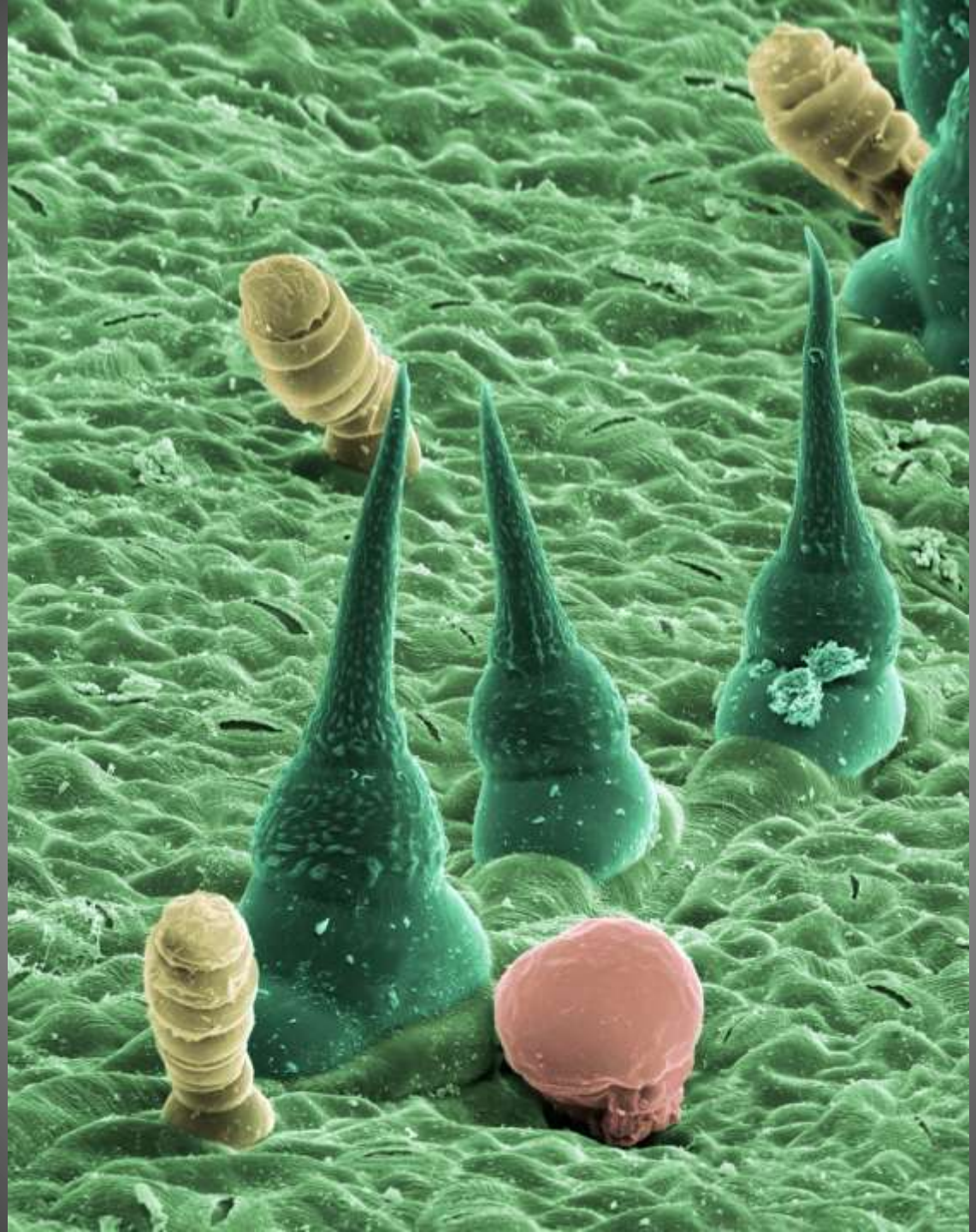

facebook

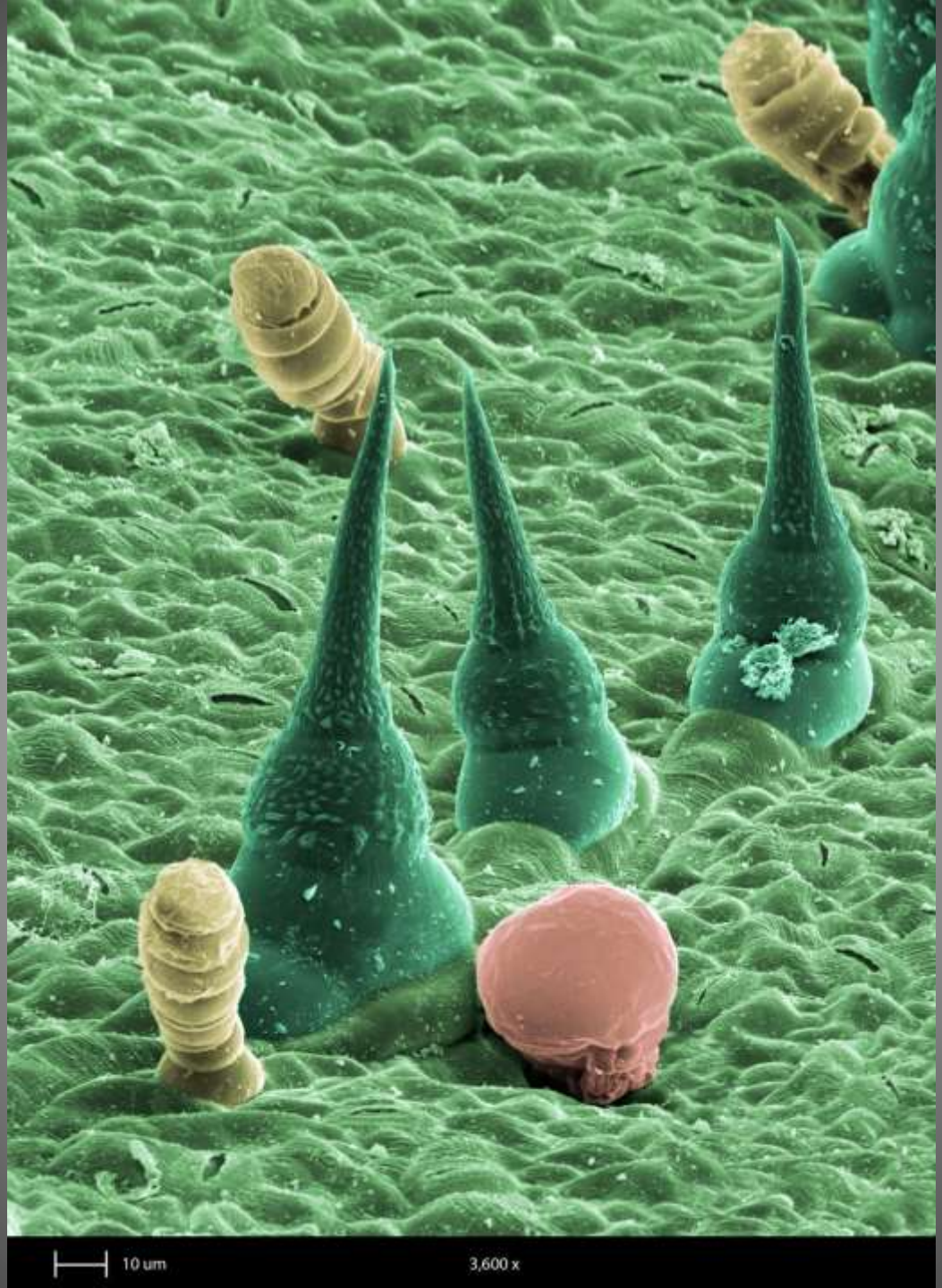
Who we train

- We train up to 25 new staff and volunteers a year to use SOS for daily programs
- The average demographic is 19-23 year old college students working as interns
- Volunteer demographics range from high school students to retired seniors and most of the volunteers do not have an education or science background

Think Like a Scientist

Take a quiet moment to think about what is going on with this image.




10 um
3,600 x

Rochester Museum & Science Center

"THINK LIKE A SCIENTIST"

1. Volunteer chooses one dataset. Turn off labels.
2. Use inquiry based method to engage all audiences.
"What is going on with this image?"
3. Turn on labels and repeat.
4. Follow observations with discussion of dataset.

New things present new challenges

- Three main challenges new people face:
  - Content
  - Technology
  - Audience

- Must be prepared to address each of these with every new trainee, but must get to know each individual's needs to make the training effective

What we found

- Even staff who have grown up around technology can find SOS intimidating
- Most staff we train to use the sphere have never seen one
- New interns and volunteers are already overwhelmed with a lot of new information – how to incorporate SOS without "breaking their brains"
- Differences exist between training interns and volunteers

Interns

What we've found works best:
Group training with time for individual follow up

- In general have a basic knowledge of the technology involved and environmental issues
- Will be using the sphere on a daily basis to give public programs (no choice, it is what they were hired for)
- Use pre-made formal programs as well as leading informal informational sessions
- Some receive additional tech trainings based on interest.
- After group training most just request "time to play" to prep for first program

Volunteers

What we've found works best:
Individual training with time to shadow staff

- May educate once a week, month, or only couple times per season (are choosing SOS)
- Mainly using SOS for informal information settings (Chat with a naturalist) by their own choice
- Receive basic training on using iPad and may learn playlist editor if interested.
- Volunteers may not have any experience with technology or a science background
- After initial training like to set up additional time to practice with staff

How We Train at The Wild Center

- Initial 2 hour training – mandatory for interns, open to all staff and volunteers
  - Focus on only what they need to know to do basic programs
- Volunteers train one on one (and later shadow/co-teach) with interns

What we do
Overcoming Challenges

Overcoming Content Challenges:

- Allow for docents to tailor playlists and give programs that interest them
- Provide pre-made program outlines for beginners and program templates for next level
- Geography games and contests to make learning fun
- Sphere scavenger hunt during training
- Provide website info and encourage them to research on their own

What we do
Overcoming Challenges

Overcoming tech challenges

- Sphere scavenger hunt during training
- Allowing lots of time for each person to practice individually
- Starting small with non-tech volunteers – basics and one playlist
- Making each person do each task (hands on vs. showing them or telling them)
- Provide step by step how to manual and contact list for when you need help

What we do
Overcoming Challenges

Overcoming audience challenges

- Interns take certified interpretive guide program, volunteers take a short training on interpretive methods
- Start everyone with informal programs, move into scripted
- Provide chances to shadow and co-teach if not yet comfortable
- Teach them to make the sphere the focus

Why Efficient Training is Important

An efficient, but comprehensive training program makes it easy for staff and volunteers to see how their time will be used to educate the public in Science on a Sphere. This makes it easier to recruit people to become involved and, when training is easy and fun, retention is increased.

Small Group Discussion

- Does your facility use staff and volunteers to give programs?
- What are things you would like to share about your training program?
- Brainstorm ideas to make training programs more inviting and how to overcome challenges?

Questions?

Contact Info

The Wild Center
45 Museum Drive
Tupper Lake, NY 12986
(518) 359-7800
www.wildcenter.org

Nick Corcoran, Visitor Services Coordinator
ncorcoran@wildcenter.org

Rochester Museum & Science Center
657 East Avenue
Rochester, NY 14607-2177
(585) 271-4320
www.rmsc.org

Sue Layton, Floor Staff Supervisor
slayton@rmsc.org