



Annual Report | 2025

USDAN

SUMMER CAMP FOR
THE ARTS



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,

In 2025, Usdan was thrilled to welcome more than 1,300 young artists to our beautiful campus – a creative sanctuary where young people can explore who they are and who they are becoming. Each day reminded me anew of how important the work we do is, and you will see that reflected in the stories and photos ahead.

This book attempts to illustrate something that – when you walk through the Usdan forest on a camp day – is obvious: arts education has a transformative impact on people’s lives, instilling empathy, confidence, curiosity, friendship, courage, dedication, and joy. In an increasingly uncertain world, we believe these foundational values are worth investing in.

Thank you for being a part of it.

Warmly,

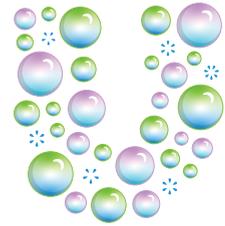
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren".

Lauren Brandt Schloss



LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS OF USDAN
Scan QR codes throughout for additional content! This composition was created by a Music student in our Found Sound class.

2025 BY THE NUMBERS



2

new "U"s for 2025*



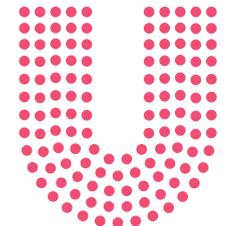
1300+

young artists served



150+

high quality arts classes offered



170+

performances and exhibitions



23K+

community members reached virtually



50K+

guests reached on site



\$2.2M+

in scholarships and tuition assistance



7000+

pumpkins adorned the campus in October



350+

dedicated employees



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*The Bubble U (top left) was proposed by students Alexandra, Brendan, Catalina, Dean, Isabella, Jack, Jonah, Kathleen, Oren & Tsehai. The Spider U (third row, center) was inspired by student Thaddaeus.

Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts' programs are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



WHY?



In 2025, Usdan's impact was more palpable than ever. How do we know?

ACA ACCREDITATION

This December, Usdan received accreditation by the American Camp Association (ACA), a special honor won by undergoing a voluntary review of 140 standards of excellence, from staff training to program design to health care practices. Only one in four camps secures this impressive certification.

TOP LONG ISLAND WORKPLACE

Usdan was named a Top Workplace for the fifth year in a row by the Long Island Press! From our dedicated administrative and production staff (it takes a village) to our stellar faculty and world-class visiting artists, everyone at Usdan is delighted to share a common goal.

HEARTWARMING FEEDBACK

"My child's mental health has improved week by week. We are so grateful for the healing environment Usdan provides by just being Usdan!"
- 2025 Parent



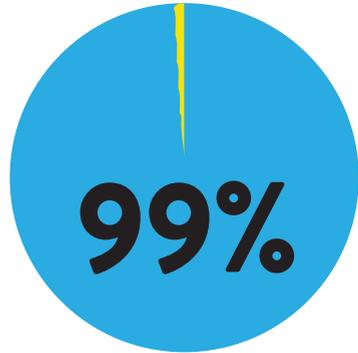
HEAR FROM THE STUDENTS

We spoke with Usdan dance student Maddox (a campus star!) about his experience at Usdan. Learn more about Maddox on the next page.

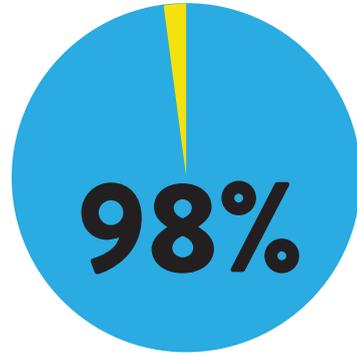
STUDENT FEEDBACK



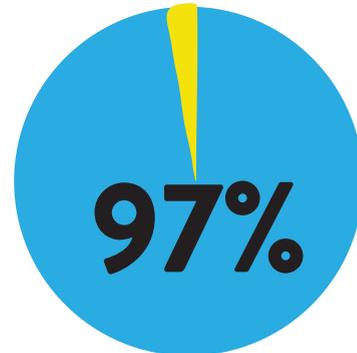
2025's survey results were resoundingly similar to 2024's:



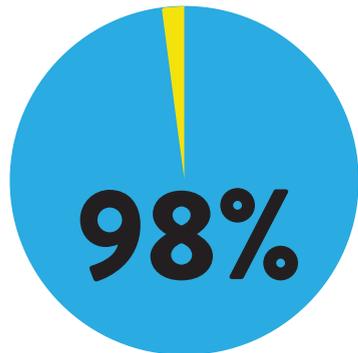
“I feel safe to play and experiment as an artist.”



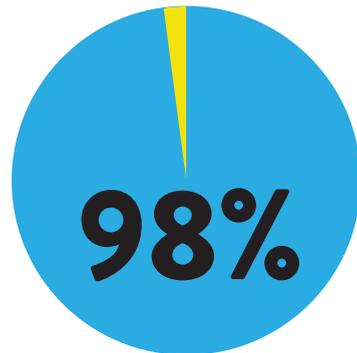
“I developed new skills and techniques as an artist.”



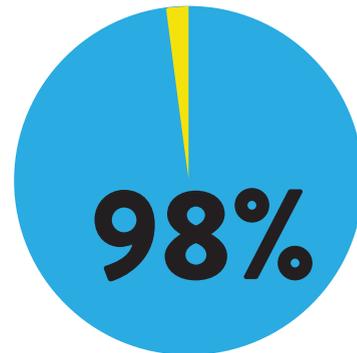
“I developed my ideas as an artist.”



“I feel included at Usdan.”



“I feel safe to be myself when at Usdan.”



“I made friends or strengthened friendships at Usdan.”

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Maddox arrived at Usdan years ago as a Music Major studying Cello. He had always loved to dance, but rarely danced in public and never had the opportunity to study movement formally. Inspired by Usdan's encouraging interdisciplinary environment, Maddox went out on a limb and enrolled in a Hip-Hop Dance Minor, “just to see what it was like.” This is the kind of creative risk-taking our curricular structure is designed to encourage.

Today, five happy summers later, Maddox has become something of a campus icon. He is one of the most admired dancers at Usdan, inspiring younger students in the studio and from the stage with his rigor and joy. Maddox has even started taking pilgrimages to New York to participate in dance events in the city, and by day – he still plays the cello!

“I used to be very, very shy, but I'm in dance battles now.”
- Maddox, Grade 9

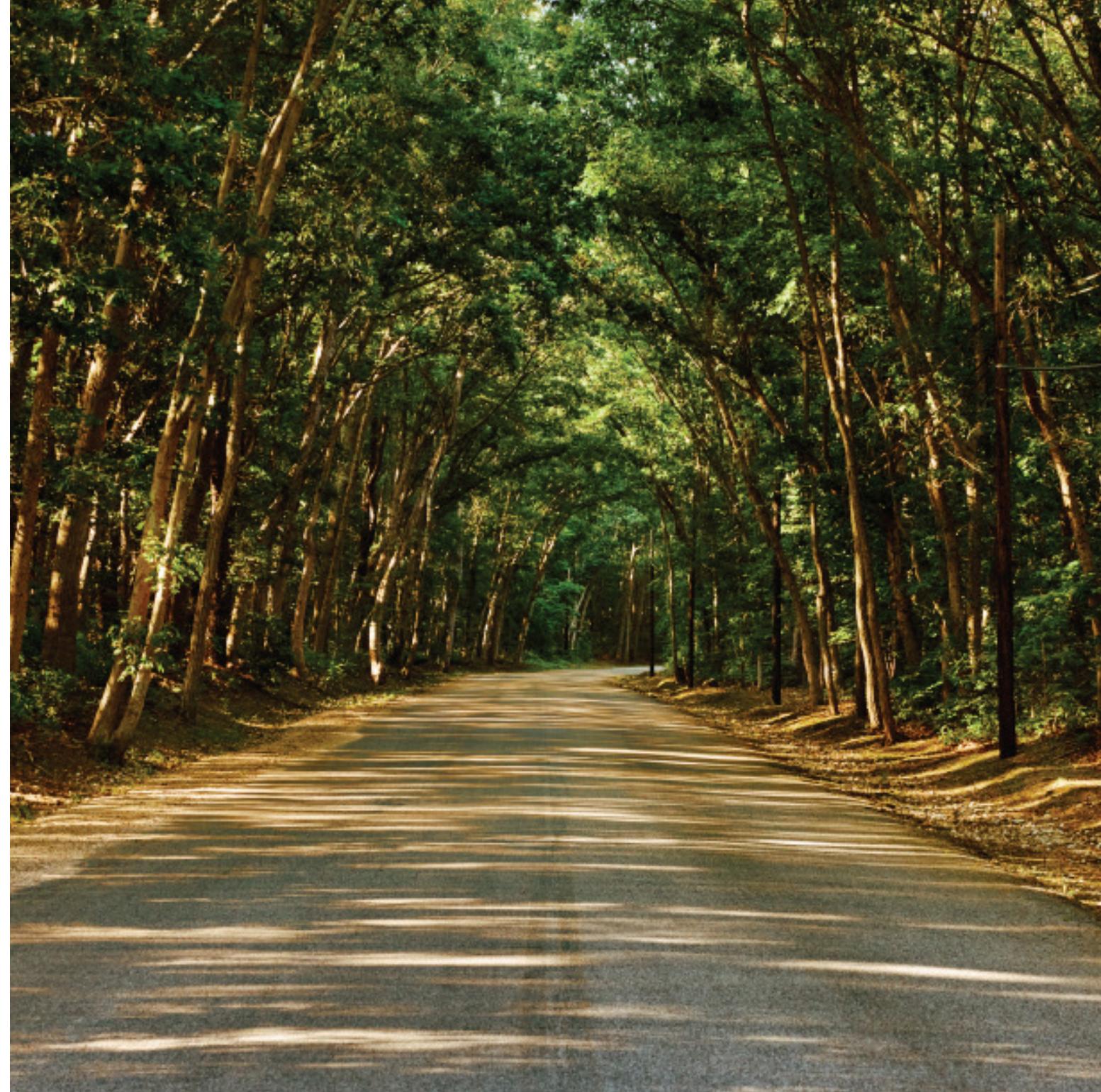
SCHOLARSHIPS

THE PROGRAM

Scholarships have been a core tenet of our organization since 1968, when one quarter of students received financial aid. Today, 57 years later, we celebrate that the percentage has more than doubled. Since Usdan's 50,000+ alumni are renowned across creative fields, investing in scholarships is more than a fleeting charitable act: it is equity work, creating opportunity from the ground up.

THIS YEAR

In 2025, over \$2.2M in scholarships and tuition assistance helped ensure that young people from across Long Island and New York City could access quality arts education and the joys of summer camp. Notable among 2025's opportunities were the Lena Hinterberger Scholarship, a need-based award for music students, the Arnold P. Hruska Scholarship, which empowers high school theater makers, and our signature Uniquely U scholarship, which honors creativity and self-expression.





WHAT?



RIGOROUS ARTS EDUCATION

First things first: Usdan is an A+ arts school. Students choose classes from eight departments – Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Dance, Music, Theater, Chess, Nature & Sustainability, and Recreational Arts – building personalized schedules of one Major, one Minor, and one Recreation Activity. Classes are led by our esteemed faculty, joined in 2025 by our distinguished Artists in Residence. Details on page 10.

ENGAGING PERFORMANCES & EXHIBITIONS

Every camp day at noon, our community gathers in the 900-seat McKinley Amphitheater for Usdan’s signature Festival: performances by students, faculty, and guest artists. In addition, regular art exhibitions, in-studio performances, student theater productions – including commissioned pieces from our New Works initiative – round out our season. See page 13 for 2025’s full Festival slate.

ROBUST COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

Increasingly, Usdan is proud to host special events and community gatherings connecting the overlapping, intergenerational LI and NYC networks we serve – including families, artists, alumni, and more – in-season and off-season, on- and off-site. See page 16 for more.



LISTEN TO “AVIVA VS. THE DYBBUK”

Hear students perform a song from an original musical debuted at Usdan. Learn more on page 15.

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE



This year marked the ninth year of Usdan’s formal Artist in Residence program, which invites celebrated artists to Usdan for three-year periods, to collaborate with students on new work inspired by young people’s creativity and concerns. Orchestral collective The Knights, social practice artist Pedro Lasch, and more have been residents since the program’s inception.

In 2025, we welcomed first-year resident Lisa Schonberg, a cutting-edge composer, author, percussionist, sound artist, and ecologist. We also welcomed back second-year residents, Hip-Hop legends DJ Kool Herc and “The First Lady of Hip-Hop” Cindy Campbell.

NEW CLASSES

In 2025, our extensive course offerings included dozens of classes, from Sculpture and Poetry to Archery and Jazz (Ensemble and Dance). Students enrolled in 4- or 8- week sessions, or in a 1-week Recreational Camp. We are proud to highlight three new 2025 courses:

INTRO TO DJ BASICS & THE HISTORY OF HIP-HOP

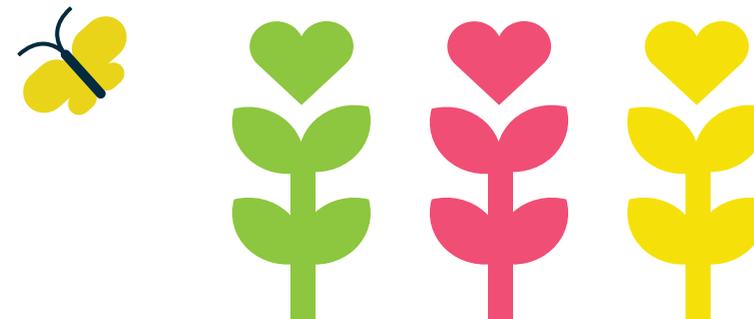
Hip-Hop pioneers and siblings DJ Kool Herc and Cindy Campbell taught this popular class, educating students on the sounds, stories, and methods of Hip-Hop – both the music and the culture. Pictured on the left, DJ Kool Herc mentors DJ E-Boy, a Usdan student.

FOUND SOUND

Taught by Usdan Artist in Residence Lisa Schonberg, this course introduced students to multi-media composition inspired by nature. In the words of one student composer: “Just standing here, it blows my mind to hear all the different sounds. I think that we all just need to stop and listen.”

PLAYWRITING

A collaboration between our Theater Department (who provided the actors) and Creative Writing Department (who provided the playwrights), in this course student dramatists wrote (and ultimately, saw performed!) their own original scenes, for delighted Usdan audiences.



PERFORMANCES & EXHIBITIONS



Usdan’s community produced over 170 artistic presentations in Summer 2025.

FESTIVAL PERFORMANCES

Our daily Festival showcases regular work by students, faculty, staff, and visiting artists. Professional performances at 2025 Festival included alumni performers Dan Kiernan (known for his work on “The Voice”), Zach & Zak (raucous cabaret duo), the Harlem Chamber Players (boundary breaking classical ensemble), and the Sam Dillon Quartet (virtuosic jazz instrumentalists); critically-acclaimed dance companies Nai-Ni Chen Dance, IMGE Dance, and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham; plus, beloved circus act The Red Trouser Show. Former Artists in Residence The Knights returned to perform original pieces by Classical Composition students.

THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

Our 29 student theatrical performances included much-loved productions of “RENT,” “Spamalot,” “Oliver!,” “The Addams Family,” “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,” and more, as well as our youngest Discovery students’ unforgettable adaptation of “Where the Wild Things Are,” and our accomplished Troupe students’ production of “Into The Woods.” (Fun fact: Composer Stephen Sondheim was on Usdan’s original artistic committee!)

ART EXHIBITIONS

Our Art Department organized two massive open studio exhibitions this year to showcase student work, along with two fashion shows, two Comic Cons, and ongoing creative gallery presentations, spanning Painting & Drawing, Ceramics, Jewelry Making, Sculpture, Sewing, Comic Art, and Photography.

FESTIVAL RECAP

WEEK 1	Dan Kiernan*	A.I.M by Kyle Abraham	IMGE Dance♦	Zach & Zak*	Festival Videos 
WEEK 2	Voices of Broadway*♦	Harlem Chamber Players*	The Cocoon Bloom Faculty Ensemble*	The Red Trouser Show♦	Adam Cordero Arcadia Quintet*
WEEK 3	Junior & Senior Creative Writing	Junior & Senior Vocal Ensemble	Senior Orchestra	Senior Band	“RENT” highlights by Musical Theater
WEEK 4	Junior Orchestra & Band	Junior & Senior Dance	Community Day Award Ceremony	Senior DJ & Classical Composition	Closing Ceremony
WEEK 5	The Red Trouser Show♦	Billy Recce	Natie	JRose/ Kyra Leeds*	Voices of Broadway*♦
WEEK 6	Brown Rice Family Band♦	Sam Dillon Quartet*♦	42nd Infantry Band*	The Cocoon Bloom Faculty Ensemble*	Nai-Ni Chen Dance
WEEK 7	“Into the Woods” highlights by the Usdan Troupe	“Into the Woods” by the Usdan Troupe	Junior & Senior Creative Writing	Senior Orchestra & Band	Senior Orchestra & Band
WEEK 8	The Knights♦	Senior Classical Composition Performed by The Knights	Community Day Dance	Junior & Senior Vocal Ensemble	Closing Ceremony & Lifer Celebration

*Alumni performer ♦Back by popular demand



NEW WORKS INITIATIVE

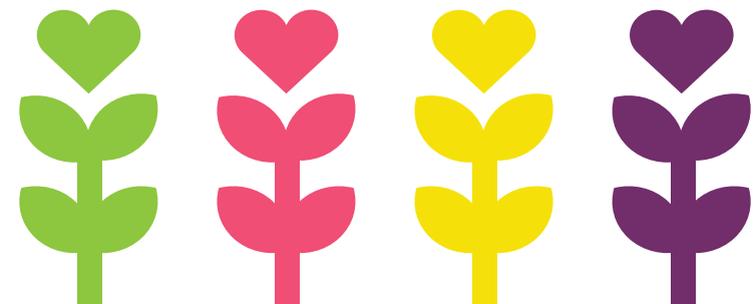


Our New Works initiative pairs student artists with professional practitioners drawn from the Usdan faculty and beyond in the creation of brand-new musicals. This year's Theater Department productions included premieres of two new Usdan-commissions:

"Aviva vs. the Dybbuk," by longtime Theater faculty Ben Boecker, dramatizing a grieving Jewish child's encounter with a trickster spirit.

"KABLAM!," by new Theater faculty Billy Recce, chronicling the historic rise and fall of a progressive children's TV show.

Students actively contributed to the creation of both works, which are intended to find further productions after their campus premieres. By commissioning these pieces, Usdan aims to expand the canon of youth theater, creating meaningful roles and stories for and by young artists.



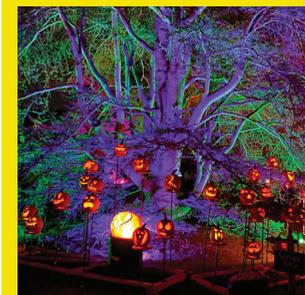
COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

The first line of Usdan’s mission reads: “We invite people of all ages to experience the natural beauty of our campus and the transformative power of the arts.” True to this, Usdan’s 2025 special events connected our intergenerational communities – families, alumni, artists, and more – to the arts, to nature, and to each other.



COMMUNITY DAYS

Held this year on July 23 and August 20, Usdan Community Days are tentpole annual celebrations that welcome one-and-all to campus to support new generations of artists.



RISE OF THE JACK O’LANTERNS

From October 3 to November 1, Usdan loved hosting RISE of the Jack O’Lanterns, displaying over 7,000 hand-carved jack o’lanterns and drawing thousands of visitors to campus, from toddlers to grandparents.



ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT PARTY

On November 13 in Manhattan, this intimate gathering connected professionals from our 50,000+ alumni community. The saying is true: “Lose yourself for a summer, find yourself for a lifetime.”



LONG ISLAND ASSOCIATION LUNCH

On August 7, we were thrilled to welcome Long Island Association’s Young Professionals Committee (and friends!) for a connection-building lunch. Usdan is a proud member of the LIA.



HIP-HOP POOL PARTY

Thrown on August 9 by Artists in Residence DJ Kool Herc and “The First Lady of Hip-Hop” Cindy Campbell, this all-ages poolside bash featured live turn-tabling, guest DJs, dance-offs, fashion contests, and lots of joy.



FASHION AT THE POOL PARTY
Check out the Hip-Hop-inspired fits!



WHERE?



THE USDAN CAMPUS

The forested, 140-acre Usdan campus is a miracle to walk through. Home to architectural gems – like the open-air McKinley Amphitheater and our three iconic swimming pools – as well as over 70 charming studios, theaters, and rehearsal sites, our students describe the campus as an “oasis” and a “wonderland.”

RECENT RENOVATIONS

Usdan was awarded competitive funding from the New York State Council on the Arts to replace one of our largest Music studio roofs, a unique structure from the 1960s. This support from the state, coupled with gifts from institutional and individual supporters, will sustain the campus for years to come.

ACROSS LONG ISLAND

Usdan’s impact is felt off-campus too: this year, key team members made Usdan’s warm presence felt across the region, tabling regularly at school fairs, philanthropic events, and arts performances. Usdan is not just a place – it is a community and a mindset.





HOW?



A DYNAMIC MODEL

Usdan is a proud non-profit. We rely on a mix of earned revenue (largely from tuition) and philanthropic support (from foundations, governments, and our amazing family of individual supporters) to sustain our generous scholarship program, world-class arts programming, exceptional faculty, mission-driven staff, and vibrant campus.

KEY PARTNERS

Each year, Usdan's mission is supported by hundreds of individuals and institutional partners. Key partners in 2025 included Governor Kathy Hochul's Office, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the UJA-Federation of New York, whose support went towards safeguarding our sprawling grounds and diverse student body.

Additionally, our collaboration with RISE of The Jack O'Lanterns continues to raise Usdan's visibility and revenue, introducing thousands of new visitors each year to our mission and brand.



EVIDENCE OF YOUR IMPACT

World-class orchestral ensemble The Knights perform original classical compositions by Usdan Music students.



WHEN?



“To have a teenage daughter come home happy with herself, delighted with what she is doing, and enjoying the pleasure and friendships of the people she is with, is truly a delight to behold!”

- Parent, 1970

“Both of my children came home with smiles on their faces and wonderful stories of friendship and perseverance to share.”

- Parent, 2025

Usdan’s present success is rooted in its history. For 58 summers, Usdan has helped students build the confidence, friendships, and creative skillsets that last a lifetime. Today, our alumni community includes more than 50,000 artists, educators, entrepreneurs, and creative thinkers who contribute to the cultural and economic life of our region: leading major cultural institutions, teaching in hundreds of arts classrooms across New York state, publishing books, headlining shows, and topping charts.

Looking ahead, we are excited to invest in our endowment, campus, capital needs, and artistic programs, and to continue nurturing new generations of artists.



USDAN THROUGH THE YEARS

Watch this video from Usdan in 1978 to see the same campus and same values decades earlier.



WHO?

FAMILIES

From the many happy testimonials we receive, it is clear that enrolling a student in Usdan is an event for the whole family. We are always delighted to get to know students' siblings, parents, even grandparents — thank you for cheering young artists on, from home and in the audience.

STAFF & FACULTY

Usdan was proud to employ 350 staff members — 250 during the summer season alone, and 100 working to make the magic happen year-round. These include drivers, security guards, health professionals, behavioral specialists, stage managers, scenic designers, content creators, finance workers, and countless others.

Usdan was thrilled to find two new Department Chairs: much-loved Usdan educator Krista Biedenbach stepped up as Chair of Visual Art, and Usdan alum Nicole Davidson made a triumphant return to campus as Chair of Music. Welcome, Krista & Nicole!

We are proud that almost everyone affiliated with Usdan, no matter their role, maintains an artistic practice — we suspect even the birds, insects, and trees here do too.

SUPPORTERS

Whether you contribute funds (our amazing network of individual, institutional, and government supporters), time (our large family of volunteers and alumni — especially our Board, Program Council, and Development Council), or invaluable guidance and connections (our trusted advisors and community partners): thank U!



2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS



HANNAH BERSON

At our Community Day on July 23, Usdan was proud to present our 2025 Alumni Award to Hannah Berson. As Deputy Executive Director of the NYC Public Schools Arts Office, Hannah champions arts education on a grand scale, and her journey started as a Visual Art student at Usdan.



MARILYN & RUSSELL ALBANESE

Our 2025 Community Award honored bedrock Usdan supporters Marilyn and Russell Albanese, whose love of Usdan has helped create meaningful scholarships for committed music students from under-resourced communities. Here's to Marilyn and Russell!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: UJA



OLD FRIENDS

This year, we are especially thankful for our ongoing partnership with the UJA-Federation of New York, grounded in our shared Jewish values of creativity, inclusivity, and generosity. It is moving to remember that Usdan was founded through the UJA Federation, opening in 1968 with a mandate to create opportunities for students from all backgrounds. On August 12, we were happy to host a UJA staff retreat on campus – look at everyone smiling above!

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



This summer, Usdan partnered with two local nonprofits — NOSH Delivers and Long Island Coalition for the Homeless — to support nearby students in need. At our Hip-Hop Pool Party and other events, the Usdan community donated school supplies — backpacks, notebooks, and calculators — for students living in shelters, as well as essential food items for Long Island families who rely on school lunches. We salute these two vital organizations and were honored to work with them.



THANK YOU

2025 Usdan students respond to the prompt: “If you were to write a thank you note to one or two Usdan teachers or staff, to whom would you write it and what would you tell them?”



“GARRETT, THANK YOU FOR BEING SUPPORTIVE ABOUT MY IDENTITY AND TAKING ME SERIOUSLY.”

“I’D WRITE TO MY CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER, AND THANK HIM FOR BUILDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO DO WHAT I LOVE.”

“THANK YOU, JAMES, FOR INTRODUCING ME TO MY PASSION FOR THEATER. WHEN I ENROLLED IN ‘THE ACTOR SINGS’ FOUR YEARS AGO, I NEVER THOUGHT I’D ENJOY IT AS MUCH AS I DO NOW.”

“MATT — THANKS FOR GETTING MY CREATIVE JUICES FLOWING, SHOWING ME HOW TO BE A BETTER COMPOSER AND BEING ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TEACHING US THE JOY OF MUSIC.”

ON BEHALF OF THE YOUNG ARTISTS OF USDAN: THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT. WE ARE SMILING EAR TO EAR.



As a 501c3 nonprofit, we are so grateful to the generosity of our community for keeping the magic of Usdan alive. If you are reading this, you are a part of the Usdan family. Thank you for supporting the unique and life-changing work we do.

The Usdan Board of Trustees is a humble but mighty group that works to ensure Usdan thrives year after year, even during the most challenging circumstances. In 2025, these committed and passionate individuals were:

Maura Charles
Lillian Z. Cohen | Treasurer
Daniel Lisk
Renee Lista
Michele Lowe | Secretary
Robert Nederlander, Jr. | Vice President
Kendell Pinkney
John Usdan | President



VIEW OUR MULTIMEDIA REPORT

The digital version includes a gallery of student artwork — one of the most important ingredients of a magical summer at Usdan.



CREDITS



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2025 FULL-TIME YEAR-ROUND STAFF:

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Kathryn Appleton, Director of Marketing
Cory Benson, Manager of Buildings and Grounds
Michele Brisco, Education Coordinator
David Buttacavoli, Director of Capital Planning, Facilities & Campus Stewardship
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Johan Van den Berghe, Director of Finance
Hannah Wizenberg, Recruitment Specialist

USDAN'S MISSION

We invite people of all ages to experience the natural beauty of our campus and the transformative power of the arts. Usdan was founded on Jewish values that inspire us to make the world more just and more beautiful. When we welcome the diverse group of passionate young artists here each summer the heart of Usdan comes alive. Our goal is to instill in our community a desire and drive to contribute creatively to the world now and for the rest of their lives.

USDAN SUMMER CAMP
FOR THE ARTS



**Council on
the Arts**

PROUD PARTNER
UJA Federation
NEW YORK

