



Friends of
Emerald Valley

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

December 2024



Photo by Alejandro Calderon

Letter from the Editor

Hi everyone, and Greetings from Emerald Valley.

As we wrap up two years of issuing this newsletter, we count the many blessings that have been bestowed upon us. We have made new friends as well as advances on numerous fronts. Little by little, more people are coming here and realizing that this is a very special place. Although at first glance, Emerald Valley does not appear to be on some kind of 'grandeur' path, we are making accomplishments on a different scale.

We finish the year with a seventh property purchase, increasing the holdings to nearly eighty acres. As Emerald Valley continues to grow, it means that there is further protection for birds and mammals.

A Keel-billed Toucan that was rescued by a friend and given to us to raise, and eventually release into the wild. 'Tuki,' as it would be called, did not want to fly away and has remained with us.

We made huge advances in the construction of the duplex cabin and it will be up and running soon.

On a more personal note, Olivia and I have finally tied the knot. After 14 years of being 'partners,' we got married in Florida.

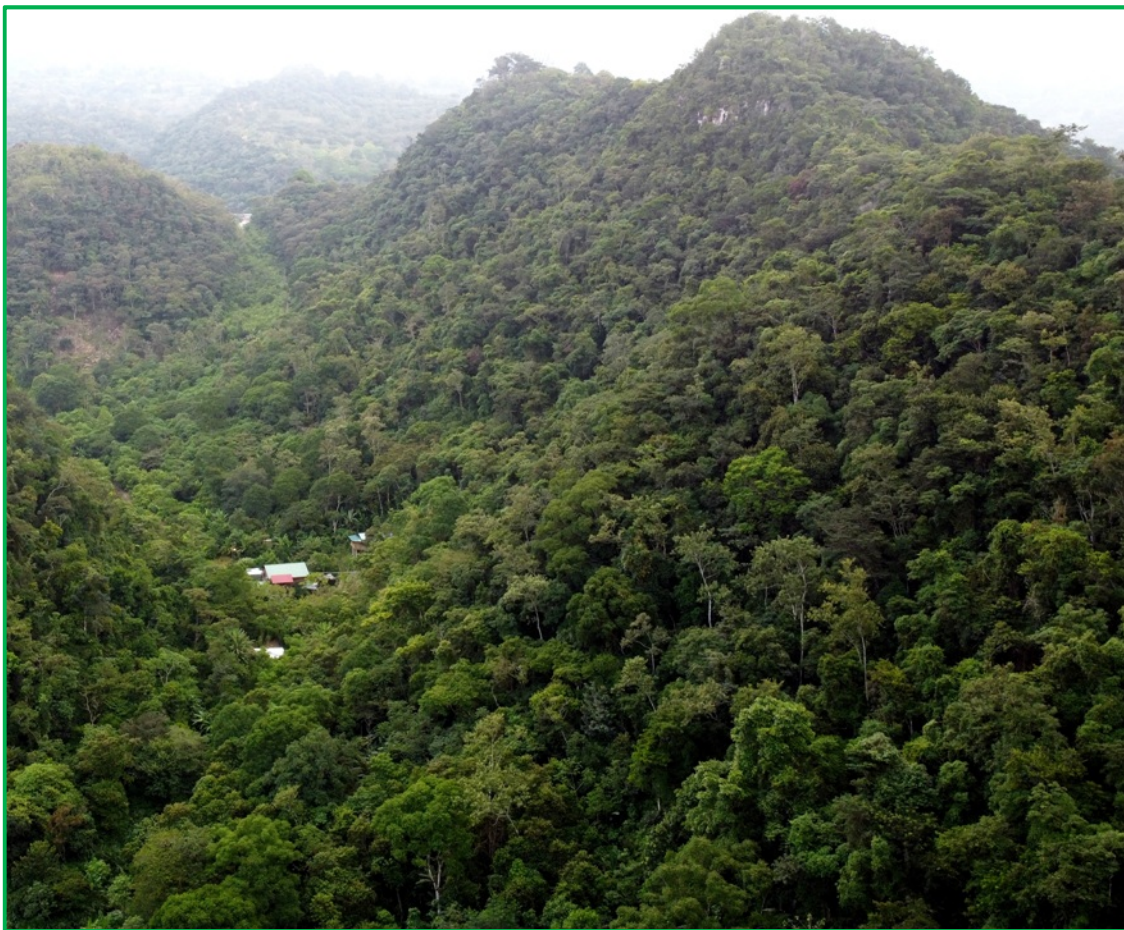
A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "B.J. Saad", followed by a long horizontal flourish line extending to the right.

p.s.-If it seems like parts of the newsletter is a bit heavy on butterflies, well, it is. We are, after all, an International Butterfly Center!

Our Vision at Emerald Valley

To create a model center, demonstrating how rainforest environments can be sustainably utilized by combining environmental education, biological research, and nature tourism strategies.

Since its inception, we have been slowly working on attaining goals to fulfill how we envision Emerald Valley should be and how to make it sustainable. We have made great strides on all fronts, including initiating the annual Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival, the only event of its kind in Latin America. School children come to participate and learn about their rich natural heritage. Our ongoing butterfly research has led us to document an amazing 758 species. Our eco-lodge is slowly growing so guests can come and stay.



*Drone view of a part of Emerald Valley, taken from above Enchanted Peak.
Photo courtesy of Yasser Alejandro*

What's New at Emerald Valley

Expanding Limits

We are so happy to announce that during the course of 2024 we were able to make a total of four land purchases, increasing the size of Emerald Valley to 78 acres. This has been possible thanks to the support of many of you who have sent in donations to the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation. A HUGE round of applause to everyone!! Purchasing these forests insures that more habitat is protected for mammals, and both breeding and migratory birds alike. We will continue to inquire about additional potential properties next year.

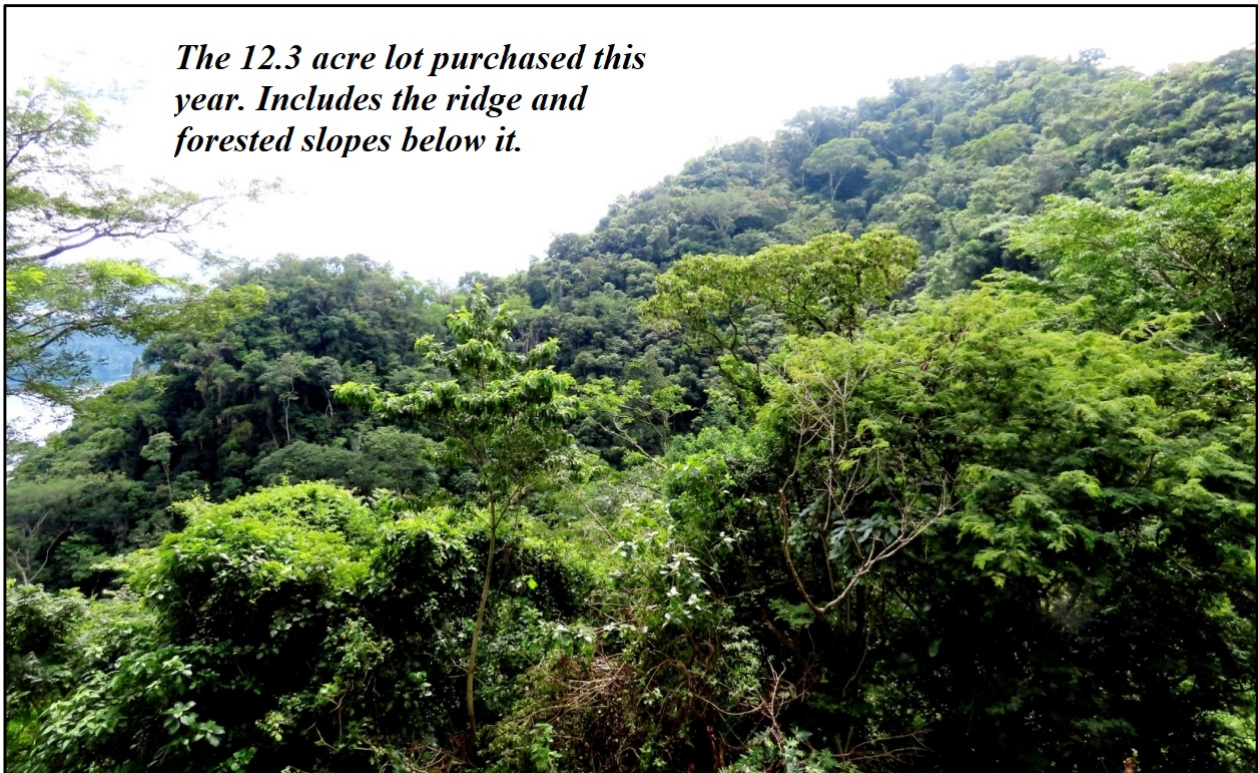


Current holdings at Emerald Valley.
The section on the lower right represent the last two purchases.

Google Earth view of the northwest corner of Lake Yojoa. The two areas outlined in white are the properties currently owned.



View of the front face of Enchanted Peak. This was purchased this year.





Pedro Hernandez. On the day we hiked the limits of the 12.3 acre lot we purchased. One of his sons has an adjacent lot that will likely be negotiated sometime in 2025.



Olivia standing at the lower limit of the Pedro Hernandez purchase. This limit comes close to the edge of the lake where it is flat.

Duplex Cabin

Since the June issue we have made a lot of progress on the new duplex cabin. All of the major construction is finished and most of the doors and windows have been installed. Robert reached out to some old friends (masons) in Copan Ruins who came to work on the flagstone stairs. They stayed for a total of 17 days and almost finished. The new cabin is slated to be up and running by the end of June.



New duplex cabin will be finished by June.



Masons initiating the flagstone steps.

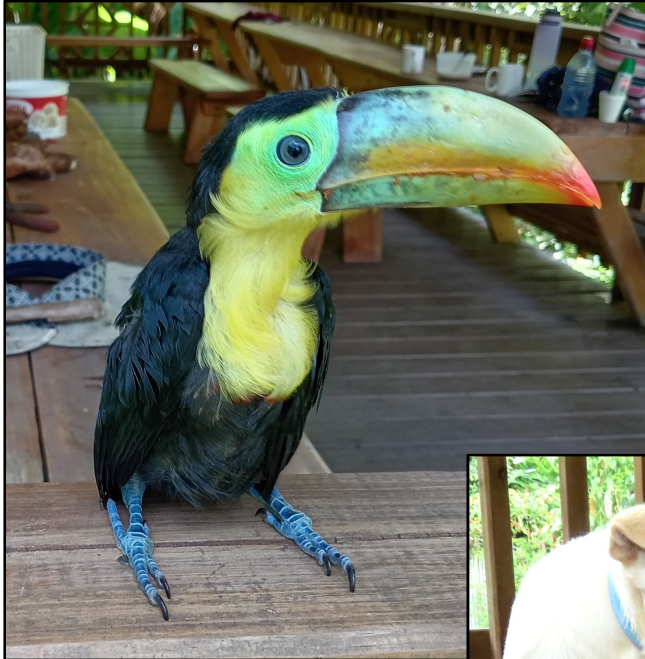


Robert with masons. Proud of their great work.

The Tale of Tuki

Earlier this year a relative of Olivia (Tato) let her know that he rescued a baby toucan from a house where it was living with chickens. One could only imagine the deplorable conditions these birds suffer when they are plucked from nests in the wild. It wasn't long after that Tato showed up with a baby Keel-billed Toucan. Plucked from one world, put into another, and now set down at Emerald Valley. It wasn't home, but it would be the closest thing it would know. We took him in and changed its diet from corn meal to fruit. A bit later I realized it needed protein so I started catching butterflies and it gobbled them up. Finally, after several months of having it inside a large enclosure, it was time to see if it would take off. We opened the pen door and it eventually came out, only to sit and bask in the sun. It did not want to go. It disappeared for nearly two days while I was in Arizona. Olivia said a bunch of wild toucans came to 'take it away' and it followed, for a ways. But it came back. To make a long story short, we named it 'Tuki,' and it has never tried to leave. It sleeps inside a Miconia shrub near the house. It comes and goes, feeds on wild fruits, and comes to the house for papaya and other delicacies. It follows us around on

the property, curious to see what we're working on. It can fly short distances and we hope that someday all the clipped primary feathers will be replaced. It seems to prefer hopping around from place to other, like a colorful chicken. It plays with Butch and is now an integral part of Emerald Valley.



The day Tuki was brought to us. Almost looks worried.



Butch and Tuki are now pals.



Tuki goes out on his own most of the day and feeds on wild fruits.

Ten Year Anniversary

In January 2015 we held the book launch ceremony at Bio Parque Paradise where some 250 people from seven countries attended. At that moment, it was the highlight of Robert's career, but not a culmination. The story of how the book came to be is long, with many 'ups and downs,' and with countless obstacles along the way. In 1993 he was the only person in the country who went out and watched birds as a pastime and there was but a mere 701 species confirmed for Honduras. By 2015 there were several hundred birders in the country, ten grassroots bird watching clubs, and an ornithological association he helped form. The country list had now surpassed 800 species and he personally added 41 country records to that list. He was able to fund raise nearly \$100K to pay for the publication of the book and put in substantial personal funds to be able to print 2,500 copies, allowing for international distribution.

*So many years of hard work
has come to fruition.*



*Olivia speaking at the book
launch ceremony.*

On a Personal Note

In December 2010 Robert and Olivia met at a Christmas bird count on the north coast of Honduras. They have been together since then, living many ups and downs as the first, then second, bird books were published. They were then ostracized from the bird watching community when someone monopolized the birding industry in the country. That is when they stepped back and started working on butterflies. Emerald Valley was started in 2016, they published the butterfly guide in 2023, and have never looked back. After being together for fourteen years they finally tied the knot at a cousin's horse ranch in central Florida. As they continue to strengthen their livelihood at Emerald Valley, they continue to strengthen their bond. They are set for Life.



Finally tying the knot.

Research News

With the increasing pace of construction at Emerald Valley, this is leaving little time to continue the ongoing butterfly study. A few more property records have been added, increasing the list to 758 species. With the VI Annual Butterfly Festival upon us, we hope to add a few more to the list. Between Robert and Olivia, and other friends, the yearly total of country records was 16. It will probably be quite some time still before they can return to the field in earnest and continue working on a second butterfly guide.

Here are a few of the newest country records.



Small-patched Metalmark-Hector Moncada



Giant Entheus-Leonel Chavez



Small-spotted Silverdrop-Robert Gallardo



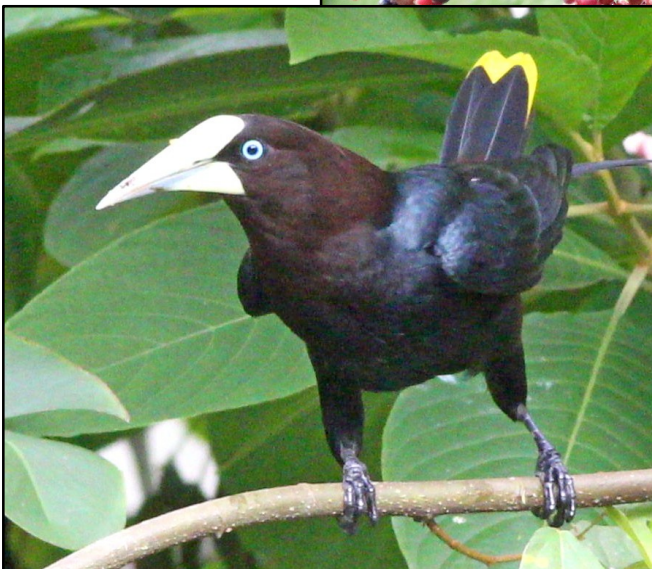
Snow-fringed Skipper-Edwin Miranda

Featured Flora & Fauna

Bird-Chestnut-headed Oropendola (*Psarocolius wagleri*). This lovely species occurs more commonly at mid-elevations in broadleaf evergreen forest. As with many oropendolas, they feed in flocks and nest in colonies. They are primarily frugivorous, but will readily take insects when the opportunity arrives. Although quite vocal, their calls are not so ‘boisterous’ as those of the Montezuma. Those of the Chestnut-headed are more bubble-like, being pleasant nonetheless. Here at Emerald Valley, there is a very large colony that often nests in trees on a neighboring property. They often pass by our facilities or feed on fruiting trees. A favorite food sources are *Miconia* shrubs, of which many varieties have been planted on the lodge grounds. At times, small numbers descend into these shrubs and can be observed at close range. There aren’t many birds in the area that possess those beautiful blue eyes.



Above-feeding on Miconia fruits.



Butterfly-Spotted Scarlet-eye (*Bungalotis erythus*). A spectacular member of the crepuscular skippers is this giant. Each year we undertake numerous visits to Skipper Pass during the rainy season to see what species are present. The species composition and numbers vary greatly each year and one never knows what will show up. We often only get to observe one of these skippers each season, and if we're lucky two will show up. Like most crepuscular skippers, this one is usually very confiding, allowing for some great photos.



Above—a very rare occasion when two arrive on the same paper bait.



Plant- Bowring's Cattleya (*Guarianthe bowringiana*). This showy orchid formerly belonged to the genus *Cattleya*. The flowers are large and paper-like, blooming in clusters. They are primarily lithophytic (growing on rocks) and bloom in February. It is one of the most popular orchids that is sold along roads where they are taken out of the wild. At Emerald Valley, however, they are safe from predation and thrive atop Enchanted Peak.



A cluster of wild orchids atop Enchanted Peak.

Testimonials

In each issue we will include testimonials from those who have visited Emerald Valley, participants of the butterfly festival, and those who support our programs. Each person comes and leaves with different experiences and we'd like to share them with everyone. It's always our pleasure to share these experiences with everyone.

“**AS** a nature photographer, my experience at Emerald Valley was nothing short of exceptional. The thoughtfully designed gardens made it incredibly easy to navigate and focus on my photography. In just a few hours, I was able to snap over 3,000 photos, capturing the incredible diversity of butterflies and other wildlife. The results were outstanding, with about 50 final images that are truly suitable for print. The team’s dedication to creating and maintaining such a rich environment made this success possible.

The accessibility of the trails and the abundance of photographic opportunities made my visit highly productive. Each step through the gardens revealed new perspectives and moments of beauty, allowing me to capture images that will undoubtedly stand out in my portfolio. The commitment to conservation at Emerald Valley has created an environment where both nature and visitors can thrive, and I left with a deep sense of satisfaction and optimism for the future of this remarkable place.

I’m incredibly excited about the ongoing and future projects to further enhance Emerald Valley, and I look forward to returning soon to continue documenting its beauty and the progress being made. The potential here is immense, and I’m eager to see how it continues to evolve as a sanctuary for both nature and those who seek to preserve it.”

Adam Rainoff-U.S.



“I visit Honduras often to see friends and family. Honduras has always enjoyed lots of natural wealth, but it has not been promoted or cared for as well as it should. However, there are always folks working to change that. The fruit of all those efforts is evident when you visit the Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center. Robert Gallardo, Olivia Diaz, and their families have put a lot into making sure that this natural wealth is known and preserved.

Emerald Valley is just one hour and minutes from San Pedro Sula, located at the north end of the Lake Yojoa basin. It offers spectacular views of the surrounding nature and also hosts an impressive number of species of butterflies (700+) and nearly 200 species of birds. This is a place to enjoy the peace and calm that nature will bring to your spirit.

I visited Robert and Olivia at Emerald Valley and could appreciate all the work that has been done to the accommodations, the gardens, and the upcoming amenities that folks would most likely enjoy this coming January 2025 as the next VI Butterfly Festival is hosted there. This is a unique site in the region with a unique Festival to promote the beauty of the region. We enjoyed the surroundings but also the food and hospitality that Robert and Olivia offered to visitors.

Just like Robert did putting Honduras on the international ecotourism map when he published the first Guide of the Birds of Honduras (about 10 years ago with editions in English and later on Spanish edition) now Honduras is the place to visit for those seeking an eco-lodge experience with an abundant number of butterfly species and bird species.

We did have a great visit and appreciate the opportunity to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings at Emerald Valley -Get Honduras and Emerald Valley to your list of places to visit. Muchisimas Gracias.”

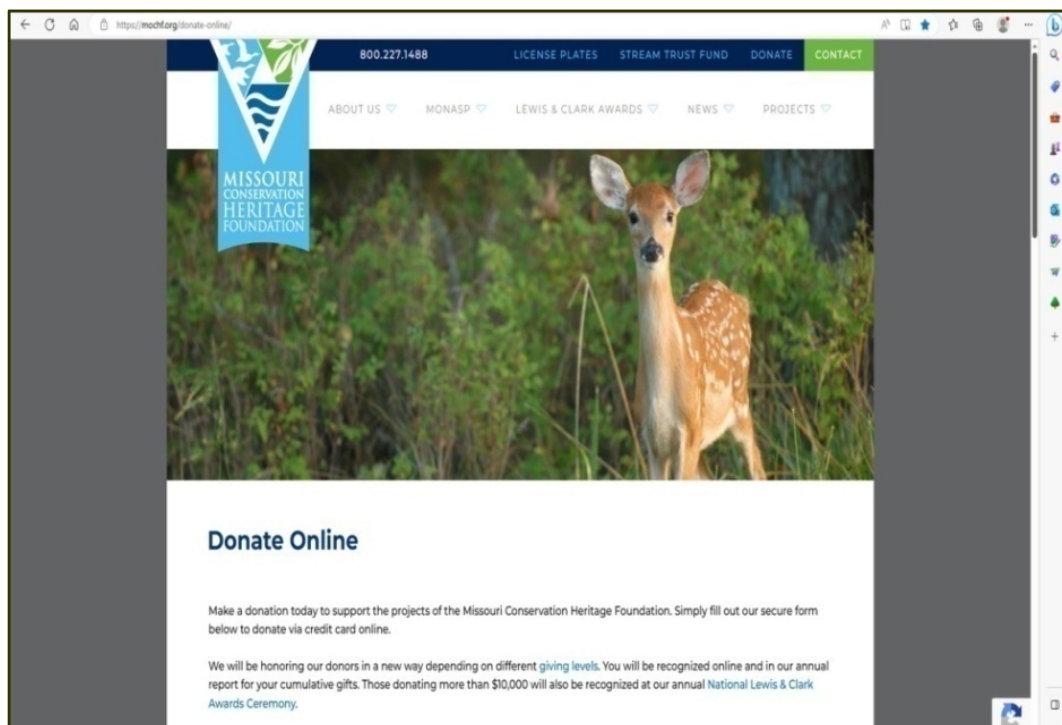
*Wilmer Fernandez-
Honduras*



Donations

Donations are gladly accepted anytime of the year. Past donations have been utilized to fund field research to remote parts of the country, fund particular projects at Emerald Valley, pay for environmental education efforts, buying bird books to give to public schools, paying for the participation of students when we offer natural history classes, and the purchasing of additional adjacent lands. Currently, all donations are being utilized to purchase available properties for conservation purposes.

How to donate-Tax-deductible donations can be made through the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, a non-profit in the United States. Online donations can easily be made. First, enter the page <https://mochf.org/donate-online/>



Next, scroll down a bit until reaching the “Designation” bar. In the box “Wherever most needed” you will find us, ‘Friends of Emerald Valley in Honduras.’ After the selection there, continue down to complete the payment process.

We will be honoring our donors in a new way depending on different giving levels. You will be recognized online and in our annual report for your cumulative gifts. Those donating more than \$10,000 will also be recognized at our annual National Lewis & Clark Awards Ceremony.

The image shows a screenshot of a donation form. At the top, there is a text block explaining recognition levels. Below this, the form is divided into sections: 'Donation' with radio buttons for '\$25' and '\$50'; 'Gift Matching' with a question about employer matching; and 'Designation' with a dropdown menu. The dropdown menu is open, showing a list of options including 'Bennett Springs Hatchery', 'Burr Oak Woods Nature Center', 'Cape Girardeau Nature Center', 'Discover Nature Girls Camps - name a specific region below', 'Kids Fishing Activities - name a specific event below', 'Migratory Bird Habitat Conservation Programs', 'Missouri Wildlife Tracking Motus Towers', 'Monarch Conservation Efforts', 'Montauk Hatchery', 'Nathan's Catch', 'Powder Valley Nature Center', 'Runge Nature Center', 'Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery', 'Shooting Ranges - name a specific range below', 'Springfield Nature Center', 'Stream Teams', 'Wounded Warriors Hunting & Fishing Programs', 'Youth Hunting Programs - name a specific event below', 'Friends of Emerald Valley in Honduras', and 'Other'. The 'Friends of Emerald Valley in Honduras' option is highlighted. Below the dropdown, there is a 'Designation:' label and a dropdown menu with 'Wherever most needed' selected. At the bottom, there is a link to 'Give more details about how you want your donation to be used:'.

A check can also be sent to them at:

P.O. Box 366
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0366

Be sure to note on the check that it is for 'Friends of Emerald Valley.'



Institutions and businesses that support our efforts.



Robert & Olivia
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THANK YOU!