Spring always evokes a feeling of freshness and energy in the woods, and this year I’m feeling that same feeling at FOW because of my new role in the organization I know and love. It is a gift to have something so familiar become new and exciting again.

Spring in the Wissahickon means renewed activity, and not just from visitor traffic. At our annual Public Projects Meeting (p. 4) I announced several major projects, tied to the completion of our three-year Strategic Trails Initiative and Ecological Land Management plan, which are scheduled to begin in 2020. This includes the design of the Valley Green Run and Pedestrian Bridge that will be a new signature feature of the park.

Things are also hopping—literally!—at the Tree House stormwater ponds (p. 10), an exciting result of FOW’s Green Stormwater Infrastructure project. Designed to slow and redirect stormwater with a series of swales, rock cascades, and ponds, this functional, beautiful project has become a home to frogs, toads, birds, and more.

Warmer weather and longer days bring even more opportunities for engagement with our community partners and friends, who help keep our extraordinary urban wilderness and watershed beautiful. Join FOW for the second annual Super Mega Volunteer Service Day on June 6 (p. 8) to remove trash, recycling, and invasives, and plant native flowers—while having lots of fun! We’re teaming up with Wissahickon Trails (formerly Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association) and the Woodmere Art Museum for our biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest (p. 16), which kicks off on April 6 and runs through October 9.

We may have lost a beloved friend last year, but Trail Ambassador Gerry Schweiger’s contagious love for the Wissahickon will continue to inspire visitors. His popular “Trails Less Traveled” series of hikes (p. 14) will continue, thanks to fellow TA Marv Schwartz. A celebration of Gerry’s life is scheduled for April 5 (p. 9).

While you’re enjoying these and many other TA-led hikes this spring, consider this: Does a visit to the park make you feel happy and healthy? A member of Weavers Way Co-op’s board and founding member of its wellness team invites us to reflect on how the amazing Wissahickon Valley Park contributes to our well-being with a series of questions on p. 13.

I am more than thrilled to be guiding FOW into its next phase of growth, and soon, into its next century. On a smaller scale, I’ll be guiding groups through different sections of the Wissahickon (and point out any FOW improvements) on the last Friday of every month during “Roving with Ruffian” hikes (p. 15).

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
SAVE THE DATE

ANNUAL FOW MEMBERS MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 2 • 6 PM • VALLEY GREEN INN
FOW members are invited to review the past year, elect members to the Board of Directors, and learn about upcoming projects at this annual event. Light refreshments and hors d’oeuvres will be offered. Space is limited and registration is recommended. Visit fow.org/events to register.

From the Field
WATCH YOUR STEP

FOW is asking park users to refrain from using the recently conserved area upstream from the Mt. Airy pedestrian bridge. This area was stabilized using soil lifts, similar to terraces, which were planted with native seeds, young trees, and shrubs. Over time, these plantings will become established growth and naturalize the streambank, which will further support the engineers’ work to the former collapse site along Forbidden Drive. But for now, it is still an active restoration site that needs to season for at least a year. Footsteps can degrade the important conservation efforts of this carefully built project. Therefore, please don’t use these terraces as stairs down to Wissahickon Creek.

Photo Credit: Jeff Boyer, RiverLogic

From the Field

CLOSURE:
WISSAHICKON VALLEY PARK BIKE TRAIL BRIDGE AT FORBIDDEN DRIVE
Due to structural damage from a recent vehicular accident, the bridge connecting Forbidden Drive to the Wissahickon Bike Trail (near “Ten Box” and along Lincoln Drive) is closed. Until further notice, bicyclists and pedestrians cannot use the trail to connect from Forbidden Drive to Ridge Avenue.

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) prioritizes the safety of trail users and appreciates the patience of park users while it conducts a thorough assessment of the damage.

GIVING
There are several ways to make meaningful gifts to advance FOW’s mission.

STOCK
Consider giving a gift of stock. Our DTC # is 0062 and our Vanguard Brokerage Acct # is 23501307.

UNITED WAY DONATIONS
Friends of the Wissahickon can receive donations through the United Way. If your employer offers United Way giving, and you would like to designate Friends of the Wissahickon as your beneficiary, please use our option code #9882.

AMAZON SMILE
If you shop on Amazon.com, use AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com) and select Friends of the Wissahickon as the nonprofit organization you would like to support. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5 percent of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to FOW.

JOIN FOW’S SUSTAINER PROGRAM
Support ongoing stewardship (and receive a special thank you gift) fow.org/sustainerprogram

TRAIL DETOUR ROUTES
For more than a decade, Friends of the Wissahickon’s annual Public Projects Meeting has given members and nonmembers alike a chance to review the last year’s key accomplishments and learn about priority projects planned for Wissahickon Valley Park in the coming year and beyond. This year, Ruffian Tittmann addressed the group, gathered at Cathedral Village in January, for the first time as FOW’s new executive director.

In the ever-changing world of the Wissahickon, nothing can be certain—except erosion and stormwater runoff. Trails that are stable and resist erosion help reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients washing into the Wissahickon Creek. These factors inform FOW’s trail and habitat improvement decisions, guided by our Ecological Land Management (ELM) Plan. This long-term plan incorporates scientific management principles while promoting stewardship that engages park users in the connected programmatic areas of land management, wildlife, and watershed stewardship.

Tittmann showcased the recently completed Forbidden Drive Streambank Stabilization Project, completed last fall. Each of the once-eroded streambank sites—approximately 1,000 feet downstream from Valley Green Inn, the Mt. Airy Avenue pedestrian bridge, and immediately downstream from the Kitchen’s Lane Bridge—is a great example of FOW’s conservation-driven construction practices. They were all stabilized using soil lifts (similar to terraces), and populated with native seeds and small trees and shrubs. Over time, these plantings will become established growth, support the engineering techniques, and naturalize the streambank.

Multiple strategic projects are on deck for 2020. Not all of them will move into construction or implementation this year, but FOW will make significant progress.

**MONSTER TRAIL**
The steep, rocky “Monster,” on the Yellow Trail heading south from West Bell’s Mill Road, is favored by park users who enjoy a physical and technical challenge. It is one of five trails scheduled for improvement as FOW looks to complete the Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI). This is a multi-year campaign to restore and preserve an environmentally and socially sustainable trail system in Wissahickon Valley Park and serve a growing community of park users for generations to come. The restoration project will include regrading, armoring, and deberming the trail to repair existing drainage and prevent additional erosion of this trail.

**LAVENDER TRAIL (GULLY NORTH)**
This project will target one of two major erosion sites along this trail, around the Chestnut Hill Avenue/Crefield Street interchange, which is one of the largest sources of sediment discharge into the Wissahickon Creek. Design and permitting for this stabilization and planting project will be underway this year.
Volunteers have always been an integral part of FOW’s stewardship in the park. In 2019, volunteers racked up more than 16,000 hours preserving the beauty, sustainability, and enjoyment of the Wissahickon. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers, nearly every one of the park’s 50+ miles of trail was improved last year, reported Field Coordinator Cindy LaRue, who stood in for Volunteer Manager Shawn Green at the meeting.

Follow progress on FOW’s improvement projects and volunteer service opportunities in this newsletter, at fow.org, or sign up for our weekly e-Newsletter at fow.org/contact-fow/.

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LOWER VALLEY GREEN RUN RESTORATION & PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
On the same scale as the Forbidden Drive stabilization, this new major streambank stabilization project will take place along Valley Green Road, the main entrance from Chestnut Hill into the Valley Green Inn (VGI) area. Years after a natural trail collapsed and the ground under a wooden footbridge gave way, the bank has eroded to the point where the area is closed to traffic. FOW will be investing nearly $1 million to stabilize the streambank along Valley Green Run and restore an essential trailhead link.

“This feature will contribute to the park’s visual landscape along the lines of the iconic Valley Green Inn, the Red Covered and Fingerspan bridges, the statues, and other favorite park sites,” noted Tittmann. “Plus, the boardwalk will present FOW with multiple fundraising and recognition opportunities.”

MORE PROGRESS
Last, but certainly not least, planning for the Restroom Facilities Master Plan will begin this year. FOW will partner with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, and possibly a civil engineering firm, to evaluate current needs and costs, including such issues as whether the absence or presence of facilities in certain areas of the park deters or drives park use. The initial project will act as a demonstration project for a future master plan to provide additional units throughout the park.

In the meantime, FOW wants to hear from you. Please share your opinions about the current restroom facilities in the park by completing this survey (thank you!): fow.org/2020wissahickonrestroomsurvey/

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Even in the cold, winter months, you can’t keep dedicated stewards away from the park! While our Saturday Volunteer Service Days were on hold for the winter months, our smaller, recurring Thursday morning Service Days have continued and have pulled in a healthy group of fearless volunteers. For these days, we concentrated on trash cleanups, invasive vine removal, habitat box repairs, and other cold weather-appropriate tasks. On January 20, we hosted a hugely successful Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service at the Thomas Mansion area of the park, with 146 volunteers who braved the cold to complete a wide variety of projects. Our Saturday Volunteer Service Days are back in full swing. These fun, informative sessions provide much needed improvements in the park. No prior experience is needed—FOW provides the tools, work gloves, and instruction. Sign up to join us at fow.org/volunteering/.

Meanwhile, our Trail Ambassadors have continued to patrol the trails and lead guided hikes in the park, Crew Leaders completed a park-wide assessment of the 50+ mile network of trails and continued to co-lead our Volunteer Service Days, and the hearty Structures Crew braved often frigid temperatures to install signs, build benches and bird boxes, and repair gates.

The winter months are also when FOW goes into recruitment and training mode. We had over 60 applicants to the 2020 class of Trail Ambassadors, Crew Leaders, and Sawyers. Those selected to join these volunteer corps will go through multiple training sessions and learn about park history, watersheds, and wildlife to share with visitors. At the end of training, this new class of stewards will be ready to hit the trails to co-lead service projects, patrol trails, lead hikes, assist park users, clear fallen trees, and engage park users in discussions about the significance of Wissahickon Valley Park.

MLK Day 2020
Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve.” Over 140 volunteers braved the cold to be of service in preserving Wissahickon Valley Park’s historic Thomas Mansion.

SPRING SUPER SATURDAYS
FOW is looking for extra hands to help beautify the park on these specially designated service days:

APRIL 4
PHILLY SPRING CLEANUP
9 am-1 pm
Meet at Ridge Avenue Trailhead
****

APRIL 18
EARTH DAY PLANTING
9 am-1 pm
Meet at Harpers Meadow
****

APRIL 25
ANNUAL CREEK CLEANUP
9-11 am
Meet at St. Martin’s Trailhead
11 am-1 pm
Volunteer picnic
****

MAY 9
SPRING LOVE YOUR PARK CLEANUP
9 am-1 pm
Meet at Bell’s Mill Road and Lykens Lane
How did you decide to volunteer with FOW?
I was always curious about how trails were built. I’ve seen maintenance teams in Utah and Washington, where they were reconstructing trails. I wanted to learn. It just so happened that I could give back to a place that I’ve used many times over in many different capacities. The more I got to know the passionate FOW team and the more exposure I had to the eager FOW volunteers and the eclectic mix of crew leaders all tied together by their love of the park, the more assured I was that I chose a cause that would have immediate impact on people’s lives.

What do you love about Wissahickon Valley Park?
One of the coolest things about Philadelphia is that we have this tranquil escape from the horns of cars and the constant pressures of day-to-day life. When I’m in the Wissahickon, it can be so quiet that you hear the wind rustling through the trees and birds talking to each other. There’s a deafening silence just after snowstorms and a faint orange glow as the morning sun pierces mid-autumn leaves hanging on for dear life to the tall trees. Being in the park is a fantasy land that quite honestly keeps me sane. I can hike, bike, climb, and fish, should I choose to … and it’s all literally right at the end of my street.

What is one of your favorite moments from volunteering with FOW?
Every moment has been rewarding, be it setting contour logs, building my first retention wall on a trail reroute, listening to a cultural talk from a guy well versed in his Lenape heritage, or at first feigning, then finding, my confidence when directing volunteers. To pin one specific moment down, I’ll say it’s the first time that grading a trail “clicked” in my brain, although riding over that same trail with your buddies a few weeks later and pointing to the work your group of volunteers did was sweet as well.

How do you think FOW contributes to the Philadelphia community?
The fact that FOW can quickly bring new people up to speed, and quite impressively, have a system in place where consistency isn’t sacrificed through volunteer turnover, is a tribute to the dedication and vision of its employees and leadership. In my mind, FOW not only is a guiding force for how nonprofit conservation organizations should be run in Philadelphia, but also a place where anyone from any background and any part of the city can come together, work hard, and overcome the daily divides, life stresses, and strife people regularly face to preserve this park for future generations.

What is your favorite spot in the park?
Many people tend to like the obvious places, like Toleration Statue, the Hermit Cave, Valley Green, or Lover’s Leap. I tend to really appreciate the more nuanced places of the park that might be glossed over. On the Yellow Trail, there’s a very brief section where the trail narrows and then snakes around some trees. If you gaze out over the creek toward the northeast, you look down from a cliff and see a variety of greens from a broad array of trees. Then you see a rising hill in the background that always tricks my mind into thinking I’m lost on a trail somewhere in Tioga County, not Philadelphia. It’s hard to convey the feeling, but I’m at my happiest on the trails.
PART II

Return of the Stewards

SATURDAY, JUNE 6
9 AM-12 PM

5 locations:
1 Historic Rittenhouse Town
2 Mt. Airy Avenue Trailhead
3 Bell's Mill Road & Forbidden Drive
4 Houston Meadow (by Courtesy Stable)
5 Pachella Field

Visit www.fow.org/events for more information and to register to volunteer.

TA Field Report

Ambassadors: Bruce Wagner & Debbie Hoellein
Date: 1/22/20 — Shift time: 9:30 am-12:30 pm
Zones: A (Northwestern Ave. to Rex Ave.)
Mode of Transportation: Hike
Number of Interactions: A few. The park was not that busy while we were out.

Dogs Off Leash: 0 Dogs On Leash: 4

When we began our shift at The Cedars House, the temperature was in the high 20s, but sunny with blue skies. We both wore ice grippers on our boots because we knew about the ice on the trails. We walked on Forbidden Drive to Bell’s Mill. We then crossed the bridge and took the Orange Trail south to the Red Covered Bridge and crossed it. We then took Forbidden Drive back to Cedars House. Along the Orange Trail, a lot of skunk cabbage was growing in the boggy areas. We saw the maroon and speckled spathe, part of the plant, poking through in many places. We were able to get close and observe the flower in an open spathe. There were many beautiful icicles on the hills by the Orange Trail. There was also a film of ice in several places on Wissahickon Creek, and ice was present on many areas of Forbidden Drive. Other areas where the sun hit were dry. On the Orange Trail, particularly on the part closest to the Red Covered Bridge, there was a lot of ice. It would have been treacherous if we did not have the ice grippers on our boots. A woman passing us noted them and commented that they were a good idea.
FOW WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBER

Varian Bosch was an FOW volunteer in various capacities, including leading other volunteers in various trail work activities, before becoming our newest Field Assistant. In his new role, Varian supports the Field Coordinator with training and supervising volunteers, from the Structures Crew and Crew Leaders in the field, to schools, corporate groups, and service day volunteers. Varian is involved with a variety of conservation projects, as well as communicating park rules and promoting FOW’s core stewardship values among visitors.

Varian’s long commitment to natural resources and environmental/wildlife conservation includes teaching students from Philadelphia schools and recreation centers about nature at the Wissahickon Environmental Center, and working on park and trail restoration projects as a stewardship assistant at Riverfront North Partnership in Northeast Philadelphia. He was also a research intern at New York Suburban Coyote Study, Bronx Zoo, and the National Park Service Office of Policy.

Varian holds a BS in Natural Resources/General Conservation from Cornell University.

An experienced winemaker, he once managed a vineyard in New Jersey.

REMEMBERING GERRY SCHWEIGER

The FOW family mourns the loss of volunteer Trail Ambassador (TA) Gerry Schweiger, who passed away in November. Gerry was born, raised, and educated in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After serving two years in the army, he moved to Philadelphia in 1972 to earn a master’s degree in history at Temple University and decided to stay. He worked for the Veterans Affairs Administration for 32 years, until his retirement in 2009. Gerry was easily recognizable in Wissahickon Valley Park and his Mt. Airy neighborhood, with his hiking staff and ever-present baseball cap showcasing his loyalty to Pittsburgh sports teams.

Shortly after retiring, Gerry began volunteering with FOW as a TA. He quickly became an integral part of our community by providing outreach to park users, mentoring new TAs, and developing his immensely popular hiking series, Trails Less Traveled. Gerry was an avid hiker and loved sharing the Wissahickon Valley Park’s unique history and unexplored treasures with everyone. Gerry often volunteered to lead school groups through the park, sharing Wissahickon highlights and explaining the importance of stewardship. His loss will be felt by countless people who were influenced by him and his love of the Wissahickon.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to his wife, Cathy, his daughters, Jessica and Lindsey, and his grandsons, Elijah and Silas. Contributions can be made in Gerry’s name to the Free Library of Philadelphia or the American Heart Association.

A celebration of life is planned for Gerry on Sunday, April 5, starting at 11:00 am. We will be meeting at the Hartwell Lane trailhead (adjacent to the Springside Chestnut Hill Academy sports fields) and taking a short walk to dedicate a bench in Gerry’s honor. Anyone who knew Gerry or attended any of his hikes is invited to join us and share their memories of him. A short hike will follow. A rain date is planned for Sunday, April 19, also at 11:00 am.
STORMWATER PONDS ARE FULL OF LIFE

By Christina Moresi, Wissahickon Environmental Center

In their second full spring season, the stormwater ponds at the Tree House are teeming with life! Such activity since their completion in June 2018 brings to mind the adage “if you build it, they will come.”

Before this Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GIS) project came to fruition, invasive plants, compacted soil, and eroded trails surrounded the landscape around the Tree House. To slow and redirect the stormwater, a series of swales, rock cascades, and ponds, complete with new native, water-loving plants, were added.

During the mid-spring construction period in 2018, the sight of open land and heavy equipment was difficult to see. Construction occurred during a poignant time in wildlife migration and mating season and caused a disruption in the land and food sources. No sooner did the construction end and the dirt settle, a storm came through. The swales flowed, the ponds filled, and life began to return.

As the summer season progressed, staff and Tree House campers kept a close eye on the system. The ponds, although meant to recede after the rain, were holding more water for longer periods, allowing for pond-dependent wildlife, such as toads, frogs, and insects, to mate and lay eggs. Birds bathed in the water, and tracks in the mud indicated other animals were also using the ponds.

A full year after the pond project’s completion, wildlife began using the pond, allowing interesting lifecycles to be completed. By the second full year, the biodiversity multiplied exponentially! The green frog’s lifecycle, for example, lasts for two-years, from egg to adult. Tadpoles hatch in the summer and need to survive the winter in the muddy bottoms of the ponds. Therefore, in the second year, for the first time ever, numerous polywogs (tadpoles with legs and arms) were on their way to becoming adult frogs.

There were many positives, but also a few challenges. The most notable being the “toad rescue,” initiated when a lack of rain causes the ponds to quickly dry out. There are two phases to a toad rescue: (1) manually adding water for the tadpoles to survive until the next rainfall, and (2) collecting tadpoles from the driest areas and then moving them to the Tree House pond. This increases survival odds; but nature also has a solution for these drier times, because tadpoles have survived under the mud, seemingly waiting out the dry period. Anticipating a lively spring at the ponds, our Twilight Pond Walk (see details on the WEC calendar, p. 15) will coincide with this year’s second annual City Nature Challenge, an international competition between cities to record the most observations of different species by the most people, using the iNaturalist app (iNaturalist.org).

For more information about this free program, open to all ages, visit pond424.eventbrite.com.

Christina Moresi is an Environmental Education Planner at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.
Love Letters to the Wissahickon

In a notebook tucked just inside the Forbidden Drive entrance of the Red Covered Bridge are letters by park visitors of all ages expressing their love — in words and even some sketches — for the bridge and all things Wissahickon. The sentiments that started a couple of years ago by a few enthusiasts have since filled multiple notebooks with the attached hanging pen, and the love keeps coming. Below are just a few of the letters with others to be presented occasionally in future issues of the FOW newsletter.

•  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •

Dear Covered Bridge:

I remember waking all over you when I was a child. That was 31 years ago. You look great! Hope you are still here when my children have children.

•  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •

My husband and I were engaged here in June 1991!

•  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •

Today the love of my life and I played hooky from our desk jobs to visit and breathe your air. Thank you for never disappointing.

•  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •

Thank you for the perfect venue for our first family bike ride.

•  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •  •

I came from Hungary to visit this wonderful place. I love the Wissahickon! So calm and peaceful. Keep going, keep loving.

Sadie and Adam by Tim O’Malley, first place winner in the Landscapes category in the 2018 Biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest.
**Valley Talks Lecture Series**

**Valley Green Inn**
**Tuesdays at 6 PM**

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**The Past and Present of the Lenape in Pennsylvania**

**The Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania**

**May 12**

The Lenape are the indigenous people of Eastern Pennsylvania, Southern New York, New Jersey, and Northern Delaware. Council members of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania will discuss the history of the Lenape people from pre-colonial to contemporary times, the state and initiatives of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania today, and the Nation's goals for the future. Topics will include the relationship between the Lenape and William Penn, the Eastern Woodland Lenape and Lenape diaspora, the Lenape language and ongoing revival initiatives, and the quadrennial Rising Nation River Journey and signing of the Treaty of Renewed Brotherhood.

The Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to increasing awareness of Lenape history and culture. Created to join together the members of the Lenape Nation and anyone else interested in continuing the development of the language and culture of the Lenape people, the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania is active in the revival of tradition and community. The organization encourages partnerships among people and organizations in order to foster cultural, historical, and environmental education and preservation.

Valley Talks are free for current FOW members and $10 for non-members. Registration is recommended, as seating is limited. Current FOW members can visit the Member Hub or contact Maeve Pollack at pollack@fow.org to register. If you would like to attend an event, but the ticket cost is a challenge, please contact pollack@fow.org to register. A complimentary wine and cheese reception is offered.

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**Discount for FOW Members at Chestnut Hill Brewing Co.**

Chestnut Hill Brewing Company is now offering Friends of the Wissahickon members a 10 percent discount. Celebrating their third anniversary and recently opened taproom, they are showing their appreciation of FOW’s stewardship and their love of the Wissahickon: “…for all of its amazing variety and quantity of trails. It’s very close to us, easy to access, and we love taking our dogs on hikes almost every day!” Chestnut Hill Brewing Company is located on the Fareway, behind the Chestnut Hill Hotel.

**Rain Check Workshop**

**Pennsylvania Horticultural Society**

**June 16, 6–8 PM**

*This workshop is free for all attendees. Registration not accepted more than 30 days before the event. For Philadelphia residents only.

Make a difference in transforming Philadelphia into a greener city with clean water. The Philadelphia Water Department’s (PWD) Rain Check program gives Philadelphians an opportunity to reduce pollution that would otherwise end up in our creeks and rivers. Rain Check is managed by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which will be hosting this workshop, where participants will learn how to get a free rain barrel from PWD and discounts on downspout planters, rain gardens, depaving, and permeable pavers.

To register, visit fow.org/events.
My family and I moved to Philadelphia from the West Coast a dozen years ago with excitement and trepidation. Two activities that year turned out to be pivotal for our well-being: (1) we signed up as working members at Weavers Way Co-op, and (2) we went to an FOW-sponsored family ice cream social, where we received a map to explore the Wissahickon.

Connecting with these two dedicated local organizations shaped our lives as we became Philadelphians. We embarked on numerous outdoor expeditions into the woods; our children scampered along the paths like goats, admired waterfalls and giant trees, and learned to identify plants, insects, and birds. Each exploration was inevitably topped off with a trip to the Co-op for some treats.

As I watched my children and their new friends explore the outdoors with such glee, I recalled my Swiss grandmother’s words when I was young and feeling stuck, grumpy, or without energy: “Go outside. Nature makes you happy and healthy.” My granny’s words ring true at a fundamental level of my being.

I invite you to take a moment to experiment for yourself and reflect on how the amazing Wissahickon Valley Park contributes to your well-being.

Movement: How does walking in the Wissahickon, among the trees and along the water, make your body feel?
From a wellness perspective, movement is Rx #1 in preventive care. It supports the body, the joints, organ functioning, heart health, the immune system . . . you name it! You can adapt your walk to any level of energy and mobility, given the web of paths in the park. The unevenness of some of the paths keeps our feet limber and helps challenge our sense of balance. The straight and flat Forbidden Drive is perfect for aerobic walking, running, and biking.

Breath: What do you notice about your breath as you explore the Wissahickon?
We often overlook the breath as a key aspect of wellness, yet the park has so many ways in which it supports healthy breath. Unless we suffer from allergies, we can enjoy the privilege of breathing in oxygenated air from the nearby trees. And a little bit of uphill walking helps stimulate our breath and circulation.

Emotions: What happens to your emotions when you are in the Wissahickon?
There’s nothing like a walk in the woods for an emotional pick-me-up. Unlike chocolate, a walk doesn’t offer a quick sugar high. Instead, it brings a gentle, sweet widening of the internal horizon as our heart opens up to the trees and lifts with the call of birds.

Mind: Do you notice a change in your thoughts when you are exploring in the Wissahickon?
While writing my dissertation years ago, I noticed that walks would shake up my circular thoughts, and I invariably landed on a new perspective that helped me slog through another chapter. When the body moves and breath deepens, the mind opens up and moves past small thoughts that keep us hostage (i.e., our to-do lists) and into a realm where we are more able to discern what is important.

Spirit: Is there an aspect of soul connection as you explore a favorite part of the Wissahickon?
I realize this is a personal question. For me I notice how my awareness awakens to being part of the greater flow of life, a connection that fortifies me at my core.

Does a visit to the park make you feel happy and healthy?
The next time you head out into the Wissahickon, take the above questions with you and discover your own answers.
Registration is recommended for all hikes (required if indicated) so that participants can be informed of weather or other emergency cancellations. Unless otherwise specified, Trail Ambassador Walks may be on rocky, rugged trails that may be wet and slippery. Wear sturdy shoes or boots with socks. Long pants are recommended for protection against occasional poison ivy and possible ticks. Bring water and a snack if desired. Unless otherwise noted, children older than six are welcome if accompanied by a responsible adult. Due to the nature of certain hikes, dogs may not be permitted; service animals are always allowed. Walks are cancelled in heavy rain or icy conditions. Visit www.fow.org for updates.

**WALKS & TALKS**

**Meanderings in the Wissahickon with Shelly Brick**

**Fridays • 1–3 pm**  
March 27—Meet at Hartwell Lane Trailhead  
April 24—Meet at Kitchen’s Lane Parking Area  
May 22—Meet at Flex Avenue Trailhead  
June 26—Meet at Chestnut Hill Avenue Trailhead  
Come explore a variety of locations and “talk story,” a Hawaiian tradition. All ages. Pace, distance, and difficulty to be determined by the group.

**Kid-Friendly Hikes with Mary Schwartz**

**Saturdays, March 28, April 18, May 16 • 10 am–12 pm**  
Meet at Valley Green Inn  
This hike takes participants along Forbes Drive and on wooded trails with interesting geologic formations. Visit the Lacey Oaks, Gorgas Creek, and Frangipani Bridge, and continue to Devon’s Pool and the Next River. Level: moderate. Distance: ~2 miles.

**Philadelpia’s Most Famous Hermit with Stan Kozakowski, Michael Bridges, and Friends**

**Sunday, March 29 • 1–4 pm**  
Meet at Walnut Lane Golf Course Parking Lot  
Explore sites in the Wissahickon associated with mystic, scholar, writer, musician, and aeronaut John Adams Florence, who chose Philadelphia in 1649 to prepare for the Second Coming. Listen to and sing his music, discuss this complex man, and explore the legends associated with him and his band of hermits. Along the way we’ll visit The Hermitage, Henry Avenue Bridge, and other notable sites. Level: moderate. Distance: ~3.5 miles.

**Birding and Sketching on the Wissahickon with Ruth Pfeffer and Jane Klein**

**Wednesday, April 22 • 8–10:30 am**  
Meet at Fortlets Drive and Belts Mill Road  
Ruth Pfeffer will host an informative, fun walk and talk about our avian friends that reside, rest, or migrate through our beloved Wissahickon. There’ll be an emphasis on waders and other shorebirds that are returning from their southern wintering range. Binoculars will be available to borrow. Trees for the weather and wear comfortable walking shoes.  
This excursion continues with a half-mile hike to the Thomas Mill Covered Bridge for an outdoor sketching session. Whether you’re a beginner or seasoned artist, all you need is an appreciation for the beauty of the Wissahickon Valley, along with a sketchbook, favorite pencil, and something to sit on. A finished work is not expected. Practical guidelines are available. Adults only. No dogs. Level: easy. Distance: ~1 mile.

**Fun with Fungi with Faith Watson**

**Saturdays, April 19, May 24 • 10 am–12 pm**  
Meet at Cedars House Café  
We will explore the trails near Ardmore Meadow and learn about the role underground fungi play in helping trees grow and communicate. You will also be introduced to the above-ground fruiting structures—knobs, buttons, shelves, cups, and umbrella—all known as mushrooms. We will not be touching or eating the fungi. But this will make for a great photography adventure! Wear sturdy boots and be ready for some hidden magic! Ages: 12+ with adult. No dogs. Level: moderate.

**Historic Elements of the Wissahickon with Bruce McDowell**

**Sunday, April 19 • 2–3:30 pm**  
Meet at Ten Box (Forbush Drive & Lincoln Drive)  
This walk includes viewing an engagement point of the battle of Germantown on October 4, 1777, an abandoned mill site, the Bluebonnet Bridge at Sku’s Lane, an abandoned site, and, finally, the Walnut Lane Bridge. Level: easy.

**The Forest and the Trees with Sadie Francis**

**Tuesday, April 7 • 10 am–12:30 pm**  
Meet at the Upper Andorra Parking Lot  
This walk is part forest bathing and meditation while we explore the intricate network of life in the woods, and part ecology lesson, while we discover the latest research on communication, chemistry, and cooperation with plants. Level: adapted to the group (juvenile giving). Children not recommended unless accompanied by adults. No dogs.

**Fitness Hikes with Andi Wingert and Debbie Hoelein**

**Tuesdays • 10 am–1 pm**  
April 7–Meet at Walnut Lane Golf Club  
May 12–Meet at Willow Avenue Trailhead  
June 2–Meet at Chestnut Hill Avenue Trailhead  
We will hike at a brisk pace but pause to visit points of interest and to observe and appreciate the surroundings. Bring hiking shoes, snacks, and sunscreen. Ages: 12+ adult. Level: strenuous. Distance: ~4 miles.

**Spring Ephemeral Walk with Kris Sozza, PA Master Naturalist, and Trish Fries**

**Saturday, April 25 • 10 am–12 pm**  
Meet at Valley Green Inn  
The popular Trails Less Traveled series is being continued in memory of former Trail Ambassador Gerry Schweiger, who inspired so many to explore the wonders of our big, beautiful park. While the Cresheim Creek flows into one of the most popular areas in Wissahickon Valley Park, relatively few visitors explore the upstream splendor of the Cresheim Valley. Join us to explore one of the most tranquil places in the park. Level: moderate. Distance: ~2 miles.

**City Nature Challenge: Twilight Pond Walk with Kris Sozza, PA Master Naturalist, and Trish Fries**

**Friday, April 24 • 6:30–8 pm**  
Meet at Wissahickon Environmental Center  
Help us record the species we find as we witness the biodiversity that has found its way to our ponds. Life cycles will be in full swing, and it’s possible that we’ll find seedlings, spawning, grasses growing, insects buzzing, amphibians singing, and more as the days blend with the night. All ages. No dogs.

**City Nature Challenge: Moss Walk with Sadie Francis**

**Sunday, April 26 • 12–3 pm**  
Meet at Elmira Street Trailhead (at the staircase of Cresheim Valley Road/Emiline Street near the intersection with Allegheny Lane)  
Explore the delicate hidden world of mosses on rocks, tree stumps, and along the streams of the Wissahickon. An amazing world normally overlooked by trail users. Learn about the diversity, biology, and habitat of mosses by observing them in their microenvironments on rolling mud, stony outcrops, and protected edges. Participants are encouraged to bring their own hard lenses or magnifying glasses, but we will have 10 hand lenses available for sharing. Ages 12+ with adult welcome. No dogs. Level: moderate/difficult to group (juvenile offered). Distance: ~2 miles.

**Wissahickon with Shelly Brick**

**Friday, April 24 • 1–3 pm**  
Meet at the Wissahickon Environmental Center  
Join Sadie Francis as she shares a presentation of photos, stories, logistics, and advice from her 200 Appalachian Trail thru-hike.

**Backpacking the Appalachian Trail with Lisa Myers, PA Master Naturalist**

**Sunday, April 19 • 1–3 pm**  
Meet at the Wissahickon Environmental Center  
Join Lisa Myers as she shares a presentation of photos, stories, logistics, and advice from her 200 Appalachian Trail thru-hike.

**Wissahickon History: Rittenhouse Town from the Late 1600s with Betsy Wallace**

**Wednesday, April 22 • 10 am–12:30 pm**  
Meet at the Upper Andorra Parking Lot  
Learn about the rich history of Rittenhouse Town, the site of North America’s first planned settlement. How did Rittenhouse Town grow into a self-sufficient village with its own school, church, and fire station, yet reside, nest, or migrate through our beloved Wissahickon? There’ll be an emphasis on waders and other shorebirds that are returning from their southern wintering range. Binoculars will be available to borrow. Trees for the weather and wear comfortable walking shoes.

**Spring Ephemeral Walk with Lisa Myers, PA Master Naturalist**

**Saturday, May 9 • 9–11 am**  
Meet at the Upper Andorra Parking Lot  
We will visit several park locations of ephemerals, including blood root, wild ginger, trout lily, and spring beauties. No dogs. Level: moderate. Distance: ~3 miles.

**City Nature Challenge: Moss Walk with Sadie Francis**

**Sunday, April 19 • 1–3 pm**  
Meet at the Wissahickon Environmental Center  
Learn about the beauty of the Wissahickon with Sadie Francis! Children not recommended unless accompanied by adults. No dogs.

**For the second consecutive year, Philadelphia is participating in the City Nature Challenge, competing against cities worldwide to observe the greatest number of flora and fauna species. Download the Naturalist app on your smart device to capture data on these walks. Learn more at cncphilly.org.**

**FOW’S GUIDED HIKES CAN BE USED TO FILL NATUREPHL PRESCRIPTIONS.**
### WISSAHICKON ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

All programs are FREE, REQUIRE REGISTRATION, and begin at the Tree House (300 W. Northwestern Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19118) unless otherwise noted. Please register at WEComeztrice.com.

#### ASTRONOMY FRIDAYS
- **APRIL 17** 7 PM • **MAY 29** 7:30 PM
  - Join amateur astronomer Roy Patton, as we discover what we might see in our night skies in Philadelphia. Meet at the Tree House for a short talk on light pollution and what might be visible that night, followed by a walk to the meadows where our telescopes will be set up. **Content is for adults, but youth ages 8+ are welcome.**

#### TWILIGHT POND WALK • FRIDAY, APRIL 24 6:30 AM
  - Join us on the second day of the City Nature Challenge! Help us record the species we find as we witness the biodiversity that has found its way to our ponds. Life cycles will be in full swing and it’s possible we’ll find seeds sprouting, grasses growing, insects buzzing, amphibians singing, and more as the daytime blends with the night. **All ages.**

#### SPRING MIGRATION
- **SUNDAY, APRIL 26 7:30 AM** • **SATURDAY, MAY 9 7:30 AM**
  - Meet local birder Martin Seiter at Houston Playground (900 Gwynn Lane) to catch an early wave of spring migration in Houston Meadow. **All ages.**

#### FULL MOON HIKE • WEDNESDAY, MAY 6 6 PM
  - Hike by the light of the full moon and enjoy the peaceful sounds of the darkened forest. Enjoy marshmallows as we gather at the campfire before our hike. **Adults only.**

#### AUNTE & DUNCLE ADVENTURES: FISHING • SATURDAY, MAY 16 8 AM
  - Auntie and uncles take your nieces and nephews on a “cute and release” fishing adventure. Meet “Aunt Christy” at the Northwestern Avenue park map on Forbidden Drive. No experience or pole needed. No license needed for children 15 & under or non-fishing adults. **Ages 6 & up. Space is limited. $5.00 family.**

#### LOVE YOUR PARK: FOOD FOREST • SATURDAY, MAY 16 10 AM
  - Join us for Love Your Park Week and lend a hand as we clean as many meadows as possible on the site of our new Philadelphia Orchard Project Food Forest. Then stick around to taste a few tasty dishes made with the same/insicers. **All ages.**

### WISSAHICKON TRAILS

Wissahickon Trails (formerly Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association) offers many public programs as part of its mission to protect the quality and beauty of the Wissahickon Trail at info@cresheimtrail.org or to volunteer, contact Friends of Cresheim Trail at info@friendsofcresheim.org or 215-715-9159.

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS IN THE WISSAHICKON

#### FRIENDS OF THE WISSAHICKON

**WISSAHICKON VALLEY**
- **APRIL 14** • **MAY 12** P.12
  - **P.3**

**ANNUAL MEETING**
- **JUNE 2**

#### HISTORIC RITTENHOUSE TOWN

Historic Rittenhouse Town offers classes, workshops, and events for individuals and families to learn about the craft of hand papermaking and other aspects of colonial life at the original Rittenhouse Family Homestead. Located at 12 Morris Rd. in Ambler. 215-646-8866.

**METHOD OF PAYMENT**

- **Check Enclosed** (payable to Friends of the Wissahickon)
- **Charge my** Visa Mastercard A/M X Discover
- **Auto-renew my membership annually**
  - (credit card info. required)

#### FOR A LISTING OF MORE EVENTS, VISIT FOW.ORG/EVENTS.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER, AND INSTAGRAM

Future calendar listings for the newsletter may be placed by contacting Friends of the Wissahickon at 215-247-0417 or office@fow.org. The Calendar of Events in the Wissahickon may also be viewed at fow.org/events, which contains updates on our events, including cancellations.

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**Friends of the Wissahickon • Spring 2020**
Calling All Nature Photographers:

2020 BIENNIAL WISSAHICKON PHOTO CONTEST

Friends of the Wissahickon is teaming up with Wissahickon Trails (formerly Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association) and, for the second time, the Woodmere Art Museum to present the biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest for individuals interested in submitting photos they captured while visiting Wissahickon Valley Park. Here’s what you need to know to participate:

- All photos entered in the contest must be taken within Wissahickon Valley Park, along the Green Ribbon Trail, or on one of Wissahickon Trails managed preserves.
- Four categories: people, wildlife, landscape, and structures.
- Participants may enter up to four photos taken within the last three years.
- Prizes will be awarded for Best in Show, First Place in each category, and People’s Choice (chosen by Facebook voters).
- All of the co-hosting organizations may feature the winning photos online, in their printed materials, or on social media.
- Entries that do not comply with the rules will be disqualified.
- Photographs will not be returned.

Contest kicks off April 6, 2020. Deadline for submissions is October 9. Winners will be announced October 23.

Visit fow.org/photocontest2020 for complete rules and details or to submit your entries!