We hope this issue of the FOW newsletter finds you safe and well. This greeting has taken on new significance since our last edition in March. With an ongoing global pandemic and an overdue national reckoning on racial injustice following George Floyd’s tragic death, we feel more strongly than ever the importance of our treasured public lands as our common ground for health, recreation, and community.

As FOW continues to adapt its work to the constraints of the pandemic, we welcome the leadership of Alyssa Edwards, who we officially welcomed as our new board president at FOW’s annual meeting (p. 8). As an organization, FOW remains steadfast to our mission to conserve the natural beauty and wilderness of the Wissahickon Valley and stimulate public interest therein – because we cannot have one without the other.

COVID-19 has brought new challenges to our work, including social distancing requirements, limits on our volunteer trash clean-up efforts, and capital project delays. At the same time, we have welcomed a record number of visitors to our urban oasis for strength and renewal during this challenging time. Coincidentally, last year FOW was designated a Leave No Trace Hotspot for 2020 (p. 5) to promote best outdoor conservation practices, guided by a carry in/carry out philosophy. While FOW begins gradual, small group park cleanups (p. 7), the need for such self-directed stewardship throughout the Wissahickon, especially in heavily visited areas, has never been greater.

In June, FOW issued a public statement supporting the Black Lives Matter movement against systemic racism. Our work now is to put action behind this statement. That means stepping up practices and programming efforts to make the Wissahickon feel welcoming to all, not just those of privilege, to best reflect the diverse city we serve. FOW will hire a consultant to guide us on a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice initiative to change the make-up of our board and examine our past actions and future responsibilities in the community (p. 3). We’ve expanded our relationship with consulting partner Let’s Go Outdoors, with whom we conducted a user experience survey in 2017 – read more about them on p. 4. This wonderful organization, which increases outdoor participation among people of color, will now be running our successful Little Friends of the Wissahickon education program online for teachers and parents (p. 6).

Speaking of digital experiences, check out FOW’s Virtual Valley (p. 17), a marvelous range of informative, nature-themed live-streamed programming, videos, and trivia, created to keep the FOW community connected to the Wissahickon during COVID-19 while Walks & Talks are on hiatus. We continue to find creative ways to continue long-standing FOW summer traditions, while promoting social distancing and other safety measures. See details about the fifth annual All Trails Challenge and the 14th annual Ice Cream Social – at a Distance on p. 10 and 18, respectively.

We hope to see you soon either in the park or on the Virtual Valley!

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
Alyssa Edwards, President
The Wissahickon Valley Park is for Everyone

By Alyssa Edwards and Ruffian Tittmann

Following the tragic death of George Floyd, FOW made a statement on June 4 against racism and violence, and in support of Black Lives Matter. In doing so, we joined many of our peer organizations in Philadelphia and around the country. As an organization it was imperative that our position was made known to our stakeholders in the community. However, we must put anti-racist polices into action throughout all of our work in the Wissahickon Valley Park. We have a responsibility to all of our stakeholders to move forward with this commitment and we must be held accountable.

While we were heartened by the overwhelming support that our statement received, we also received messages of opposition. Specifically, we were asked how such a statement relates to our mission and our stewardship of the Wissahickon Valley Park. Our answer is: There is an inextricable nexus between access and enjoyment of public parks and systematic racism and social injustice.

Our mission is to conserve the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley and stimulate public interest therein. As an organization we embrace both parts of our mission – nature and people. And within this mission is a commitment to stand up to persistent injustices that plague our Philadelphia community and society at large.

We recognized years ago that FOW programming resources were invested in private schools and individuals with considerable resources and privilege. This realization caused a paradigm shift in our thinking that materialized into the development of our Little Friends of the Wissahickon program (see story on p. 6), planning to build a neighborhood engagement initiative with our consulting partners Let’s Go Outdoors (see story on p. 4), and evolving in our in-park engagement work from rules enforcement to education and information through the principles of Leave No Trace (see story on p. 5).

Nevertheless, our organization has a significant amount of work to do. If we are working to connect our community with its park, we should also work to make sure the park is welcoming when they arrive for a visit. This means recognizing that not everyone has had the privilege of feeling safe to enjoy the great outdoors because of the history of violence and racism in these spaces. This means recognizing that the design of public spaces has a history of reinforcing exclusion from the space. This means recognizing that we must put diversity, equity, inclusion and justice at the core of all our work. We will continue to share with you how the forces listed above exist in our park and what we can all do to make changes. Our immediate next steps are:

- Retaining a consultant to guide us on a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Initiative (DEIJ)
- A commitment to making our board reflect the diversity of our City at our next board cycle in June 2021
- Through the establishment of a DEIJ Committee and through conversation at the board, staff, and community level, examine our role in the community, actions of the past, and how we can change the future
- We cannot be a conservation body that strives to promote an ecologically diverse and functional habitat for watershed health, land management, and wildlife, without also celebrating the diversity of humanity that seeks out the Wissahickon Valley Park's many pleasures. We cannot ask visitors to respect the park and not to respect each other and their right to enjoy this public space.

Thank you as always for your shared love of our beautiful Wissahickon Valley Park and for joining us to make it a place that welcomes everyone to its wonder.

Alyssa Edwards is President of the FOW Board of Directors and Ruffian Tittmann is FOW’s Executive Director.
Partner Spotlight:

LET'S GO OUTDOORS

A fter finishing college at separate schools, twin sisters Tarsha and Keisha Scovens wanted to spend some time together before embarking on their adult lives. It was 2010 and they spent the next year or so discovering the outdoors on a cross country road trip, eventually taking posts with AmeriCorps in Utah. The Scovens sisters, who are women of color, went camping and joined hiking clubs, seeing a lot of nature – but not a lot of people like themselves.

Outdoor experiences were not part of their childhood in Connecticut and, evidently, they weren’t alone. Whether due to lack of access, awareness, opportunity, or a combination of all three, statistics show that African American outdoor recreation participation rates have historically been lower than among other ethnic groups. Case in point: The Outdoor Foundation’s 2019 Outdoor Participation Report found that there “…continues to be a gap between the diversity of outdoor participants and the diversity of the U.S. population… Caucasians represented 74.8% of moderate participants, the highest among ethnic groups. Since 2013, African American moderate participation has remained steady around eight percent.”

Tarsha realized it was a pattern she didn’t want to see repeated with her children or other young people of color and set out to change it. With guidance from the Women’s Business Development Center in Philadelphia and a grass roots survey in her West Oak Lane neighborhood about people’s interest in participating in outdoor programs, Tarsha built her passion into a proposed business venture. Her vision – Let’s Go Outdoors – would be an outdoor programming organization built around the premise of getting young people of color – and their families – outdoors. According to a 2018 survey by the Outdoor Industry Association, “adults who were introduced to the outdoors as children were more likely to participate in outdoor activities during adulthood than those who were not exposed to the outdoors as children.”

In 2012, Tarsha won the Turning Point Award from the Women for Social Innovation group, a former giving circle of The Philadelphia Foundation, which offered seed money to “emerging social innovators for developing creative and entrepreneurial solutions to a difficult problem affecting women, girls, and families.” Let’s Go Outdoors became a reality.

Before COVID-19, Let’s Go Outdoors offered varied program models based on a primary three-step model to alleviate barriers to outdoor experiences for under-represented populations. It involved a classroom/indoor lesson, an onsite outdoor activity; and a field experience. But, like so many organizations, they’ve taken their educational programming virtual with story times and limited socially distanced activities. Despite current program restrictions, increasing student and adult interest in the lifelong benefits of the outdoors and attracting new stewards of nature continues to be their goals.

To carry out its motto of “Connecting City Communities to Outdoor Experiences!,” Let’s Go Outdoors’ depends on the strength of organizations collaborating in the environmental and “green” space.

“We partner with organizations that support the same vision and interest and want to serve as an extension of us in their communities,” said Tarsha, who runs Let’s Go Outdoors with Keisha. Now living in Lancaster, Keisha also oversees the organization’s 22 educator consultants, as well as its therapeutic program initiatives, focusing on improving youth speech communication skills using outdoor activities and themes. Let’s Go Outdoors currently works with 14 partners to engage families in activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, boating, and more.

Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) has been one of these partners since 2014. Among their recent collaborations: In 2017, Let’s Go Outdoors conducted a survey with FOW of non-Wissahickon Valley Park users, particularly people of color residing in neighboring communities, to learn more about their perceptions and use of the park and how FOW can make it more welcoming. Last year staff members played games and made summer memory books with little ones at FOW’s annual Ice Cream Social. Recently, FOW has partnered with Let’s Go Outdoors to offer the Little Friends of the Wissahickon program, a free virtual story program for children in kindergarten through second grade enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia (read more on p. 6).

The Scovens sisters are spearheading a movement to ethnically diversify outdoor participation. For more information about getting involved in Let’s Go Outdoors outreach or taking one of their neighborhood surveys, visit letsgooutdoors.net.

Let’s Go Outdoors staff play games and create summer memory books at FOW’s 2019 Ice Cream Social.

Photo Credit: Charles Uniatowski
Friends of the Wissahickon • Summer 2020

As we're venturing out more, now is the perfect time to take a look at Leave No Trace's Seven Principles, a framework of best outdoor conservation practices, and be ready to apply them, not just in the Wissahickon, but in any green space. Leave No Trace is also offering a free online Awareness Course to provide “…a better understanding of recreation-related impacts and how the Seven Principles and Leave No Trace skills can help protect the outdoor places we love.”

“Our relationship with parks needs to be symbiotic. Green spaces like the Wissahickon Valley Park do so much for us, and it’s our responsibility to make sure we return the favor,” said Shawn Green, FOW's Volunteer Manager.

Solo stewardship has never been more important – or appreciated. Photo Credit: Trisch Betcher

Our relationship with parks needs to be symbiotic. Green spaces like the Wissahickon Valley Park do so much for us, and it’s our responsibility to make sure we return the favor.

~Shawn Green, FOW Volunteer Manager

To keep ourselves, our communities, and our outdoor spaces safe and healthy during this time, please consider these recommendations from Leave No Trace:

1. YOU AND YOUR OUTDOOR WORLD

You may be asking: Can I go for a hike or walk on Forbidden Drive right now? Your personal vulnerability, the health of others in your community, access to local and uncrowded spaces, and more play into this decision. Wear a mask when around others and continue following physical distancing guidance to stay at least six feet away from anyone not living with you.

2. EXPECT CLOSURES

As businesses continue a gradual reopening in the Philadelphia area, which ones are open and ready for visitors will vary. Consider bringing hand sanitizer, a snack, and water – and bring a bag to pack all your trash out with you.

3. PACK OUT YOUR TRASH

With limited staff and services likely in many parks and protected areas, trash and recycling receptacles may not be emptied as often as normal or at all. This can result in trash overflowing from receptacles, which becomes litter and can harm wildlife. Instead, pack your trash and recyclables out with you all the way home and use your own receptacles to dispose of them properly.

4. AVOID TIMES AND PLACES OF HIGH USE

Physical distancing applies in the outdoors just as it does anywhere else. To avoid being part of the creation of large crowds and groups at popular outdoor areas, spread out to less popular spots, and avoid times of highest use if possible. Try exploring some new locations on your park visit - there’s 50 miles of trails to choose from in the park’s 1,800 acres, and many unique historical points of interest to discover along the way. Plan your visit to the Wissahickon here: https://fow.org/visit-the-park/maps/.

5. BE CONSIDERATE AND KIND TO OTHERS

We are all in this together. Outdoor public spaces belong to everyone. Be considerate of others. Be patient, yield the right of way when necessary. Remember to do your part to take care of each other and our beloved outdoors.
LITTLE FRIENDS OF THE WISSAHICKON IS ENGAGING FUTURE PARK STEWARDS ONLINE

The Little Friends of the Wissahickon program works to inspire young people in Philadelphia’s public schools to explore and experience Wissahickon Valley Park, and to start families on their own journey of discovering the natural world together. Introducing children to natural spaces and instilling in them knowledge about, appreciation of, and respect for the planet creates citizens who are engaged in the preservation of environmental resources. It is FOW’s hope that Little Friends is helping build the next generation of stewards in the Wissahickon Valley.

The program, which launched in 2018, was inspired by the enthusiastic response to FOW’s Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park board book. Published two years earlier, the popular story takes preschoolers and their parents on an engaging and colorful hike through the park.

In just one year, 428 kindergartners and first graders from the James Dobson, Anna B. Day, Henry H. Houston, Anna L. Lingelbach, John B. Kelly, and John S. Jenks Schools participated in the Little Friends program. The students received a copy of Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park, a park map, and guided nature activities at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.

To keep the program going and growing during COVID-19 restrictions and beyond, FOW has partnered with Let’s Go Outdoors to offer Little Friends as a free virtual story program. Expanded to include second graders, it:

• Incorporates reading, map identification, and outdoor awareness
• Easily connects to the virtual classroom and/or home learning schedule
• Promotes virtual exploration of nature and local waterways through story pictures and online maps
• Enables educators to read Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park as a fun way to provide park information. Each participating child receives a free copy of the book and a certificate.

When schools are able to take field trips again, FOW envisions resuming the Little Friends in-park activities, while continuing to deliver the program virtually.

Parents, teachers, or educators interested in joining Little Friends of the Wissahickon are invited to register here. Or feel free to call Let’s Go Outdoors at 866-878-3595.

Tarsha Scovens, Founder and Director of Programming for Let’s Go Outdoors, poses with Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park.

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In the case of an emergency, every minute counts. At Chestnut Hill Hospital, we understand the faster you receive emergency care, the better your outcome can be. That’s why you can rely on our 30-Minute E.R. Advantage®. We’re here for you, 24/7.

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CREATIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN THE TIME OF COVID

By Shawn Green, Volunteer Manager

These are challenging times we’re living in. We had an exciting schedule of large-scale cleanups, strategic trail work projects, structure improvements, and fascinating Guided Walks and Talks lined up for the spring and summer 2020. Like so many other things, however, concerns relating to COVID-19 have suspended all of our group stewardship activities—even as the park sees a huge increase in daily usership.

Fortunately, FOW’s corps of dedicated volunteers are a resilient and creative people. This time at home has allowed us to build out some robust online programming through our Virtual Valley. With the help of our volunteers, this online hub provides a host of fun things to do while we’re stuck at home. Check out the Creekside Classroom for video presentations created by several of our Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders, or the Trails to the Past page for an ever-growing collection of articles on the many historical points of interest in the Wissahickon. On the Larks & Recreations page, you’ll find trivia, games, coloring pages, and a wildflower matching quiz put together by an FOW Trail Ambassador. Take a look at Wissahickon Reflections for stories and artwork inspired by the park, many of which were created by our volunteers.

Even in these trying times, some of our extremely dedicated volunteers have continued to make the park a better place. Many of our Crew Leaders and Trail Ambassadors have performed their own trash cleanups, either alone or with members of their households. We’ve also heard from general park users who have volunteered their time picking up trash while out on the trails. This is heartwarming to hear, and I can only hope that everyone who is helping out or just visiting the park is doing so safely by observing social distancing and wearing a mask. Speaking of masks, our friends at Philadelphia Parks & Recreation have been desperately in need of them, as supplies have been hard to come by. Fortunately, many of our volunteers helped out by creating cloth masks out of old FOW All Trails Challenge T-shirts and delivering them to a no-contact drop point.

FOW staff is working on contingency plans for the still uncertain future, laying out several safe options for returning to the field, where I know many of our volunteers are eager to be. The increased traffic on the trails and incidences of high winds and rain definitely have created a lot of work for us. If there’s one thing I know though, it’s that FOW volunteers are tough, adaptable, and passionate, and that the Wissahickon will be back in their good hands soon enough!

We are grateful to the handful of volunteers who continued to clean and improve the park during the imposed restrictions necessitated by COVID-19.

Return of the Stewards

We are grateful to the handful of volunteers who continued to clean and improve the park during the imposed restrictions necessitated by COVID-19. As Philadelphia continues its gradual reopening, FOW is beginning to return to organized volunteer work in the park. We are moving slowly and cautiously, beginning with small groups of our trained, long-term volunteers, based on individual comfort levels (and, of course, their COVID-19 risk and status).

For now, FOW is still not holding public volunteer service days, but will reassess plans later in the summer, with safety being the determining factor, as with all FOW activities. For ongoing updates on FOW’s future plans for engaging volunteers and other Wissahickon Valley Park news, please follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @FOWissahickon, and sign up for our weekly e-newsletter.
FOW’s Annual Meeting was different this year, to say the least. More than 70 members and staff came together virtually on Zoom to review FOW’s 95th anniversary year in 2019 and get up to speed on the organization’s operations in an uncertain time.

Welcoming the members, President Jeff Harbison began by emphasizing the collective love for Wissahickon Valley Park that has brought the Friends of the Wissahickon together for nearly a century, and which remains strong despite the many challenges of 2020. “We’ve certainly reinforced how important the park is to our well-being, both physical and mental,” Harbison said, thanking FOW’s membership for pulling together for the sake of the park.

FOW Treasurer Jim Walker showcased this commitment in his report, highlighting the enormously successful 95th Anniversary celebration and the $2.3 million FOW raised in 2019 to power its projects. Thanking the Budget and Finance Committee and the membership, he ended by emphasizing FOW’s gratitude to the members who support the organization financially and by their continued efforts year after year.

FOW Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann reviewed the organization’s many accomplishments in 2019, beginning with two wildly successful events in honor of its 95th Anniversary. More than 300 volunteers and staff contributed over 1,000 hours of service to the Super Mega Volunteer Service Day at 10 different park locations in June. FOW’s milestone year culminated with our most successful event ever: The 95th Anniversary Celebration Party at historic Erdenheim Farm in October drew more than 350 guests, who honored the future of Wissahickon Valley Park with an unprecedented level of support which will propel FOW through this year and on to even greater things. “Hopefully, someday soon, we’ll all be gathering again for events big and small – but in person,” said Tittmann.

2019 saw progress in all of FOW’s strategic priorities of infrastructure, habitat, and engagement, including the completion of two major milestones: The Forbidden Drive Streambank Stabilization Project, and the Ecological Land Management (ELM) plan. The million-dollar streambank restoration project which repaired multiple erosion sites along Forbidden Drive will have a significant impact on stormwater management and the Wissahickon Creek’s overall health and water quality. Look ahead past FOW’s current holding pattern on restoration projects, the Monster Trail is still on deck to go into construction later this year.

FOW’s executive director also emphasized the importance of the ELM plan’s mapping of critical habitat zones as a blueprint for balancing the needs of Wissahickon Valley Park’s many users with its role as a critical habitat for migratory birds and wildlife.

THANKS TO OUR OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS:

LOUISE “Weezie” JOHNSTON served multiple terms as an FOW board member since 1996, as well as on FOW’s Advocacy Committee, the Joint Easement Committee (with CHC), the Development and Governance Committees. As a child, Johnston spent many happy hours playing in the Wissahickon Valley, where she enjoyed looking for salamanders under rocks and splashing in the tributaries. Now, she enjoys hiking the trails. We are grateful to Weezie for her decades of commitment to FOW,
decades of commitment to FOW, decades of commitment to FOW, decades of commitment to FOW.

JANICE SYKES-ROSS joined the FOW board in 2017, bringing with her significant institutional experience as the owner of event planning company Request for Professionals, Inc., and as a member of multiple local boards and civic organizations, including PHLDiversity, the Urban League Guild of Philadelphia, the North Broad Renaissance, and the Waldorf School Community Organization. Currently, she is the Executive Director of the Underground Railroad Museum at Belmont Mansion. A graduate of Trenton State College, Sykes-Ross is also a member of the Greater Exodus Baptist Church. FOW will continue to benefit from her thoughtful guidance.
She highlighted FOW’s engagement and community ties as a critical piece of FOW’s mission, emphasizing that making sure the park serves the needs of its users and remains an asset that everyone in the region can enjoy is key to successfully conserving the Wissahickon. Despite the disruption of COVID-19, FOW has continued its outreach programs online through the Virtual Valley, with programming from ecology to geology, history, and more. Anticipating the area’s gradual re-opening, preparations have begun for the first stage of a safe return to organized volunteer service on July 1.

Another ongoing success is FOW’s Little Friends of the Wissahickon program, a personal favorite of Tittmann’s, which brought kindergartners and first graders from several Philadelphia public schools on a field trip to Wissahickon Valley Park. The more than 170 students received a copy of the Good Night Wissahickon Valley Park book, a park map, and guided nature activities at the Wissahickon Environmental Center. The program has continued virtually during the pandemic, and, working with a consultant, FOW plans to expand it across the city and include second graders as well. “We want all these little people to come back to the park as grownups and as stewards, feel welcome, and enjoy it,” she said. Follow FOW on Facebook @FOWissahickon to hear more about this program or if you know of a school that would be interested in joining.

The evening’s keynote speaker was Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR) Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell. Since assuming this role in 2016, she has been the force behind numerous initiatives to engage communities with their parks. In discussing PPR’s role as a human and social service organization, Lovell described the critical work around food insecurity that PPR manages and highlighted her department’s more than 50 years of success with the Playstreets program, which provides safe places for Philadelphia’s children to play each summer. She also was candid with the audience about the city’s COVID-19 fiscal crisis and 20 percent cuts to PPR’s budget (as of June 2), recognizing FOW’s ability to “pick up in places where we can’t provide” and emphasizing that our continued help, especially over the next year, is “beyond critical.”

Expressing her gratitude to FOW, Lovell said “It’s such an incredible organization and amazing park partner, really probably the best stewardship nonprofit in the country, that I know of…we are so fortunate.”

One new board member was elected this year, who is eligible to serve a maximum of seven years as an FOW Director (one introductory year and two, three-year terms):

Will Whetzel brings significant experience in institutional guidance as a prior board chair of FOW, a member of the board of trustees of The Nature Conservancy, Pennsylvania/Delaware chapter, as well as the board and executive committee of the Philadelphia Youth Sports Collaborative. He was an investment advisor with the firm Mitchell Sinkler & Starr until his recent retirement in March, having previously managed institutional sales for Parker Hunter in Pittsburgh, and specialized in investment banking for the media industry with the firms Henry Ansbacher, Inc., Kidder Peabody and Morgan Grenfell in New York.
In 2016, Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) launched the All Trails Challenge (ATC) as a way for people to explore the Wissahickon Valley Park’s 1,800 acres and 50+ trails while also supporting the continuation of FOW’s extensive conservation work. Since then, this event has grown in popularity and impact, engaging 1,500 donors and Challengers, with 24,000 miles explored and raising more than $103,000 for park preservation.

On August 17, the fifth annual ATC, kicks off for FOW members; August 31 for the general public, and continues through December 2.

ATC isn’t a race and you don’t have to be a conditioned athlete to take part. It’s a fun, family-friendly activity that invites people of all ages and fitness levels to hike, walk, run, bike or horseback ride through every corner of the beautiful Wissahickon. (Dogs, on leash, of course, love it too!)

Many people rarely go beyond Forbidden Drive when visiting the Wissahickon Valley Park, let alone exploring all 50 scenic trails. Now is your chance to truly go the distance – discovering new, and often lesser travelled, trails is a great way to add social distance between you and more crowded areas. At the same time, you will be helping safeguard the future of the park that adds so much to our quality of life.

The Wissahickon is always there when our bodies and minds need healing, for which we were especially grateful during the height of the pandemic’s restrictions. And, the significant health benefits of spending time outside, from reducing heart disease and high blood pressure to stress, have been widely documented. Overall, it just feels good to get fresh air and move your body.

Find out how to participate at fow.org/alltrailschallenge. Visit often for regular updates and news about incentives, giveaways, and prizes. And keep up with the ATC fun by following @FOWissahickon and #FOWAllTrails on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

SAVE THESE DATES FOR THE FIFTH ANNUAL ALL TRAILS CHALLENGE:

Monday, August 17 - Advance registration for FOW members

Monday, August 31 - Official ATC start date

Once you register as an ATC Challenger and start sharing your progress, you’re well on the path toward fabulous prizes for mileage and more. And along the way, while ATC Challengers help fundraise for FOW’s trail improvement projects, they’ll be getting cool swag, and building a Challenger community at ATC events. (All participants must register with a minimum of $50 raised or contributed to be eligible to compete for any prizes.)

Interested in sponsoring this popular event? Contact Maeve Pollack at pollack@fow.org.
One of my tasks as editor of the Shuttle, Weavers Way’s newsletter, is to read Ruffian Tittmann’s column in every issue. Over the last year or so, while doing that (or looking over the dispatch from Ambler’s Wissahickon Trails), I’ve felt a tinge of sadness (and guilt) over how little time I spend in the Wissahickon even though I live in Northwest Philly. How little? I haven’t taken a walk in the park for almost eight years.

But I had a deadline, and so I set out for my closest trail on a recent cloudy, warm Sunday, equipped with a face mask and bottle of water. While the entrance I chose was less populated than Forbidden Drive or Northwestern Avenue, it was busy enough, with walkers, runners, and bikers using the trails, to burn off pent-up energy during the COVID-19 lockdown. As a result, I was extra watchful, always ready to veer off on an alternate path or step aside to let someone pass.

My path wound uphill, offering an elevated view of the creek from across Lincoln Drive. I saw I could get closer to the water by heading down a steeper slope to my left, and so I set my Vans slip-ons to the task. A massive rock outcropping—hollowed out over time and sporting a blunted beak, like a bird of prey—caught my eye as I made for the muddy bank.

I rested on a rock near a lovely patch of silverygreen bryum moss and took in the quiet. A few sunfish glided over a submerged boulder in the creek. On the opposite bank, a trio of fishermen cast their lines into the cloudy, greenish brown water. Nice to breathe, I thought.

As often happens on these excursions, I ended up leaving the park from a different (and farther) spot than where I entered. And that was fine. At least I knew enough not to turn onto the path heading toward Forbidden Drive. Once the fairway of Walnut Lane Golf Course came into view over a small ridge, I knew I was good to go.

Bill Bryson, in his book A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail, wrote about the virtues of walking without thinking. “Instead, you exist in a kind of mobile Zen mode, your brain like a balloon tethered with string….Walking for hours and miles becomes as automatic, as unremarkable, as breathing.”

And that’s the beauty of it.

Karen Plourde is editor of the Shuttle, the Weavers Way Co-op newsletter.
Weavers Way Co-op members earn working member credit by volunteering for FOW.

The view from Weavers Way’s Karen Plourde as she rests on the rocks.

Photo Credit: Karen Plourde
Pauline Berkowitz  joined FOW as Capital Projects Coordinator, a newly created position to support Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann in managing all aspects of FOW’s capital projects within the Wissahickon Valley Park, such as reporting and other information required by grantors to keep projects moving forward. Pauline is also largely responsible for any of the organization’s map needs, translating data into legible maps for FOW, both internally and externally. She’s currently working with FOW colleagues on updating the park’s trails map.

Pauline comes to FOW with extensive experience working with nonprofits that address food security through food banks, regional farms, and urban agriculture. She also completed an AmeriCorps service term at a local nonprofit focusing on improving food security for rural and urban communities.

A New York City native, Pauline spent seven years in Binghamton, New York, earning her bachelor’s degree in Environmental Studies and a master’s degree in Sustainable Communities. She loves growing flowers and vegetables, and enjoys biking, painting, and exploring all the natural areas Philadelphia has to offer.

FOW’s new Communications Coordinator Noah Kulak works to tell the story of the Wissahickon Valley Park and the people who love it by supporting the Development Manager with marketing communications. Responsible for overseeing FOW’s digital presence, he updates the website, writes the weekly blog, and runs the Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. Noah also helped launch the organization’s online Virtual Valley, for which he continues to create content and educational programming with FOW’s partners and volunteers.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Noah has always been inspired by the city’s unique community and its strong connection to an amazing park system. He holds a BA in Classics from Tufts University, and before joining the FOW team, was a communications associate for The Blue Lab, a progressive political consulting firm, and a docent for the Fairmount Park Conservancy. Catch him running on trails, reading, and cooking something good.

FOW announce that our FOW shop of Wissahickon-themed shirts and other custom items has moved to online distribution! Check out our limited-edition T-shirts, including the popular design “It’s the Schist.” We also have a collection of FOW-branded face masks. To all those who have experienced fulfillment delays due to COVID-19, we apologize and are working to make sure you receive your items as quickly as possible once the FOW office reopens (in the near future, on a limited basis). Thank you for continuing to wear your love for the Wissahickon!

For Your Park Visits

**SAVE THESE IMPORTANT NUMBERS**

To report park damages, downed trees and littering:
**TEXT WISS TO FOW AT (267) 966-2207.**

To report non-emergency situations:
**CALL THE PARK RANGERS AT (215) 685-2172 OR CALL 311 TO REPORT IT TO THE CITY.**

To report a wildlife incident:
**CALL THE PA GAME COMMISSION AT (610) 926-3136.**

If you need help right away because of a medical emergency or an immediate danger:
**CALL 911 AND DESCRIBE YOUR EMERGENCY.**
What is your connection to the Wissahickon Valley Park?
I grew up here and spent countless hours during my teenage years riding horses and exploring every trail from one end of the park to the other. The park was very different then. There were stables, where I worked, that rented horses, and later, in the 1980s, I was a riding instructor at Monastery Stables. I remember knowing every single mounted police officer who rode in the park. The locals never called it “The Wiss” and there were no named trails like Orange, Yellow, White, etc. We would just say we were going “back the crick.” There certainly wasn’t the volume of people using the park then as there is now. The quality and maintenance of the trails were not what they are today, either. I moved to Florida and was gone for 30 years but always made time to hike in the park on my visits home. I was aware of how the park was changing and improving over the years. I knew there would be a time in my life when I would get involved with FOW.

How did you start volunteering with FOW?
During one of my visits about 10 years ago, I saw people wearing official-looking FOW shirts and found out they were called Trail Ambassadors. I thought to myself, “I could do that.” When I moved back to Philadelphia in 2016, I knew I wanted to get involved and meet new people. I spent my first summer back here volunteering with the Crew Leaders on Thursdays. During my time in Florida, I was very active with the Florida Trail as an activity leader. I used to lead hikes there and do trail maintenance, so becoming an FOW volunteer was an easy move to make. I also liked the idea that there were training classes available to increase my knowledge.

What is your favorite thing about volunteering with FOW?
There are so many ways to get involved with the park. As a Trail Ambassador and Crew Leader, I have lots of options. I have experienced just about everything you could possibly do as an FOW volunteer at least once. My favorites are leading hikes, doing presentations, plantings, and removing invasives. I have also met some really great people. My areas of interest are plants, trees, and geology, and there are many opportunities to learn from other volunteers.

COVID-19 put quite a damper on stewardship activities. Tell us about what you were able to accomplish in this time.
I have been doing solo trash pick-up, particularly in high-use areas, once a week. I have done presentations currently available on the Virtual Valley Creekside Classroom page and I hope to be able to do some invasive removal. I made some face masks for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation employees. I am also looking into areas of the park that would be of geological interest once we can start leading hikes again.

What is your favorite place in the Wissahickon?
It’s hard to pick one particular area. However, the White and Lavender Trails, the Yellow Trail between Summit Avenue and Wises Mill Road, the Kitchen’s Lane area by the Creek, and Andorra Meadow come to mind when I think about places I like to go.
MAKE A MARK IN THE PARK FOR SOMEONE SPECIAL

If you’re looking for a special way to honor or remember family or friends who love the Wissahickon Valley Park, consider the following in-park recognition opportunities that support FOW’s conservation mission and provide a meaningful addition to the park for years to come.

HABITAT BOX
A habitat box is a beautiful way to support native nesting bird species in the park. A recognition plaque with your custom inscription will be placed either by the Warming Shed near Valley Green Inn or in the Andorra Natural Area.

BENCH WITH PLAQUE
A bench offers an opportunity for park visitors to sit and reflect. FOW will attach a plaque engraved with your custom inscription on a bench and install it in a location of your choice.

KIOSK PANELS AND PICNIC TABLE PLAQUES
Kiosk recognition plaques with multiple panel options are available for individual or group purchase. Recognition plaques for picnic tables in one of the park’s designated picnic areas are also available.

For more information, complete this form to be contacted by an FOW staff member. Or, if you’re ready to make your in-park recognition donation now, click here.

REMINDER
GIVE US YOUR BEST SHOTS
Deadline for submissions to the Biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest is October 9. Visit fow.org/photocontest2020 for complete rules and details or to submit your entries. Prizes of $150 will be awarded for Best in Show, $75 for People’s Choice, and $50 for first place in each of the people, wildlife, landscape, and structures categories. Winners will be announced October 23.

Thanks to our wonderful business sponsors at Chestnut Hill Brewing Co., FOW Members now get a 10% discount on their menu of wood-fired Neapolitan Pizza and craft beer! Email Maev at pollack@fow.org or visit the Member Hub at fow.org to find out to take advantage of the discount.
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

**SUPPORT FOW THROUGH THE UNIVERSAL CHARITABLE DEDUCTION**
To help ease the economic burden caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which includes a provision—a universal charitable deduction (UCD)—that can benefit small businesses and nonprofits like FOW. The UCD allows taxpayers who don’t itemize to now deduct up to $300 a year in charitable contributions, with three important specifics:

- The contributions must be in cash (gifts of stocks, clothes, vehicles, and property are not included).
- Contributions must be given to a 501(c)(3) public charity (FOW qualifies). Contributions to nonoperating private foundations, support organizations, and donor-advised funds are not included.
- The UCD provision applies to calendar year 2020 only, at this time.

For some time, nonprofits have wanted Congress to extend charitable deductions to people who don’t itemize their returns—a group that includes about 85 percent of Americans, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy. The UCD is designed to send the message that no matter how modest your contribution is, every little bit helps during this difficult time. You can benefit a cause you’re passionate about while getting a break on your taxes. And it may even introduce some people to the world of giving.

For more information on how to use the UCD for FOW, email Maeve Pollack at pollack@fow.org.

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**TAKE THE RED COVERED BRIDGE HOME**
Now you can have one of Wissahickon Valley Park’s iconic features in your own home with your own miniature paper version of the Red Covered Bridge. Go to fow.org/virtual-valley/larks-and-recreation/ and print, cut, fold, and tape it together, then proudly display your little Bridge. Take the #CoveredBridgeChallenge - create your own little scene and pose the Bridge in it, then photograph your creation and tag @FOWissahickon on social media. (Many thanks to Bryan Green at paperfoldables.com for donating the design.)
Research aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of biological control methods against the destructive spotted lanternfly (SLF) is underway in Berks County, the first place in North America where the invasive pest from Asia was found in 2014. Since then, the pest has spread to at least 26 Pennsylvania counties, and has also been detected in New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

SLFs feed on important agricultural commodities — including grapes, tree fruit, nursery plants and hardwood lumber — as well as natural habitats, parks and backyards. Economists at Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences warn that this insect, if not contained, could drain Pennsylvania’s economy of at least $324 million annually in damage and cause the loss of about 2,800 jobs.

Leading the study, being performed in a remote section of the Blue Marsh Lake Recreation Area, are scientists from Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences and Cornell University who will build on research the team conducted last year at Norristown Farm Park in Montgomery County. That study’s results suggested that biopesticides containing a commercially available biopesticide, — a native soilborne fungus that attacks insects but is not harmful to birds and mammals, including humans — were effective in reducing spotted lanternfly populations.

“An early priority of our research team is to find an effective and environmentally sustainable form of management for the spotted lanternfly,” said Heather Leach, spotted lanternfly extension associate at Penn State. The study began in June and will continue into the fall.

While broad-spectrum insecticides and other control methods applied to individual trees successfully kill SLFs, they are labor intensive and do not manage the SLF population across large areas. Therefore, the study is employing both ground and aerial sprayings of Beauveria bassiana, which is commercially available and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency for safety standards, to provide the broadest coverage within the study’s target area, and to best target SLF’s different life stages.

The research team, which includes scientists from Penn State’s Center for Pollinator Research, is including the insecticide currently used to control SLF, dinotefuran, as a positive control in the study to evaluate the effectiveness of the biopesticide compared to the insecticide. The study will help determine if this biological control can be effective for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to utilize in their SLF management programs.

Besides PDA and USDA, project partners include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Penn State Berks campus.

For information on how to identify and control spotted lanternfly, report an infestation, and more, visit the Penn State Extension here.

Excerpted from a May 15 article from the Penn State Extension.
VIRTUAL VALLEY

Until Walks & Talks guided hikes are back in action, visit FOW’s Virtual Valley. This online resource was created to keep our nature-loving community connected to the Wissahickon when we were all inside during the height of the COVID-19 crisis, but it has become a wealth of information and fun. Enjoy videos, maps, trivia, art, interactive family and Wissahickon-focused activities, plus live-streamed programming starring FOW’s Trail Ambassadors and other volunteer experts anytime you want. Here are a few of our offerings - click on each of them to make them come alive.

Marvelous Moths with Kris Soffa
Native Plants with Lisa Stout
Buttercup Cottage History with Carol Scully and Linda Gdowik
Backyard Birding with Ruth Pfeffer
Watersheds with PWD’s Dottie Baumgarten
Hiking the AT with Lisa Myers

LET’S BE FRIENDS.

BECOME A MEMBER >
Participating businesses: Bredenbeck’s • Cedars House Cafe  
• Chloe’s Corner • Michael’s Water Ice • Tranzilli’s Real Italian Water Ice  
• Trolley Car Cafe • Valley Green Inn

Businesses interested in participating may contact Maeve Pollack, pollack@fow.org.