COVID-19 has challenged FOW to be more creative than ever in order to keep conservation efforts and community programming going, while also meeting required safety measures. To our surprise and delight, we’ve had an overwhelming response to these new or adapted activities. For example, we turned our 14th Annual Ice Cream Social (see p. 16) in August into an “at a distance” event, which not only benefitted FOW but local businesses as well. We’re launching a FOW Map App and moving to digital membership cards to create more useful, convenient tools for the public, at this difficult time, as well as eliminate paper waste. There are more details on p. 7.

Current circumstances have both increased visitors—and litter—in the park, and limited the volunteer cleanup power on which we have always depended. FOW’s unique answer to this situation was our Wissahero (p. 3) self-guided stewardship campaign. Since it launched in June, we’ve seen an amazing outpouring of volunteer efforts, which has resulted in huge improvements in the park.

And it’s been wonderful to see many of the Wissaheros also participating in the All Trails Challenge (p. 5). There’s still time to join them—ATC ends December 1. This popular, family activity has returned even stronger than before with great prizes. It’s an excellent way to social distance while experiencing new sections of the park with your COVID-19 “bubble.”

Also in this issue: Find out how flexibility and other resourceful actions have enabled Valley Green Inn’s continued success despite the pandemic (p. 13). Our adorable new Kid’s Page (p. 14) features a nature-themed scavenger hunt you can bring on your next family trek in the park. With Halloween nearly here, try out the animal cut-out masks, too. Speaking of Halloween, spend yours with FOW’s Trick-or-Trash cleanup (p. 9) - costumes are highly encouraged — and at Let’s Go Outdoors’ Trash or Cache event (p. 12).

As FOW continues to focus on our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our own organization as well as in the park, we invite you to join us in learning more about how to help the Wissahickon Valley Park become a more equitable and welcoming public place. (See resources on p. 12).

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
FOW has always relied on volunteer power to conserve Wissahickon Valley Park, and these difficult times have been no different. COVID-19 created a unique challenge to the stewardship of the park that required a unique solution. Park usership increased during the already busy summer season, while limiting what volunteers could do safely. Our trained volunteers (read more in the Volunteer Update, p. 9) have been accomplishing a lot throughout the park, but it just wasn’t enough to keep up with the unfortunate litter left behind by so many visitors.

Our **Wissaheroes** to the rescue! Appealing to the good nature of our wider community to take an active role in the stewardship of the park, we launched a special website for this initiative to provide instructions, safety tips, and specific locations that are consistently in need of a cleanup. We also created DIY cleanup kits that include trash bags, gloves, and a special FOW volunteer-branded mask. We were delighted by how quickly the first round of kits were claimed.

Since launching the Wissahero campaign in June, we’ve seen an amazing outpouring of volunteer efforts, which has resulted in huge improvements in the park. As of September 1, 133 Wissaheroes have come out on their own, putting in over 200 hours of work and picking up and hauling out more than 7,000 pounds of litter from the creek and forest!

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**Anne**: It’s not complicated: I feel so lucky to live near the Wissahickon. Being in the park and around other people who also love it are among the reasons I applied last year to be a Trail Ambassador (TA). But the park has been “loved to death” during our collective quarantine, and sadly, a few people have left behind a lot of trash, from the forgotten bottle cap to socks to mostly empty bottles. When Shawn asked for help with the cleanup, I was delighted to have a reason to pitch in. My fellow TA and friend, Stan Kozakowski, signed on also. It’s nice to have a buddy to share the small successes—a parking area clean of bottle caps. Cleanup is not without some pretty funny moments—like last month when Stan found a woman’s wig, still in its original packaging! When visitors stop us to say “thank you,” it gives us a chance to point them to FOW.org.

**Stan**: The Wissahickon is an ever-changing natural wonder, a place of refuge in an ever-busy, crazy world. For me, a visit to the Wissahickon can create a sense of awe and connectedness to other people and something much deeper and profound. As others have come to the park seeking a getaway, some people, unfortunately, are not aware of the impact that their trash has on the park and the greater environment. Serving with others, such as Anne, has been a fun opportunity to get out of the house, spend time with friends, and make the park a cleaner and better place for generations to come. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity.

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As long as people are coming to the park, we will always need folks to pitch in and help take care of this special place.

— **Shawn Green**
Lonna Gordon (with husband, Michael Kopinsky, and children, Ayal and Zev)

When I was a little kid growing up in New York City, I used to play in a little copse of trees in Prospect Park and pretend I was in a forest. I love that Philadelphia is a big city that makes forest parks available to its city dwellers. I think it’s great that more people are enjoying the park these days, and I’m happy to help keep it a pleasant place for all. The Wissahickon Valley has been a favorite of mine since I moved here almost a decade ago. Michael and I dated in the park, strolling past the Hermit Cave and climbing Livezey Rock. We trained for a backpacking honeymoon on the Yellow Trail, seeing most of the park that way. We bring our kids to play in the creek and feed the ducks and take regular photos of our growing family under Kitchen’s Lane Bridge.

We’ve often thought about volunteering. This year, when the email came asking for Wissaheroes, we thought, “We can do this!” Any time, anywhere—you don’t get more convenient than that. Michael, an Eagle Scout, already tends to pick up litter when he hikes, so the kids are pre-trained to spot trash on the trail. Our kids are two and four, and eager to help with whatever we do. The Wissaheroes program gives us a great opportunity to spend family time in a park we love, while also making it a better place for others. Plus, our kids will learn to share and care for the spaces that give them joy.

Deena and Sterling Johnson (with Samantha Zrillo)

We’re always looking for opportunities to help with “social” lifting, and this one was really easy for us as it checked so many boxes: it allows us to give back to one of our favorite places; it gives us an excuse to get out and get some exercise during these trying times of COVID-19, when we are otherwise limited; the FOW SWAG is really cool; and it gives us a reason to vary our usual hikes as we now try to maximize our litter pickup.

Craig Oppenheimer

I’m a cyclist and frequently ride the paved trail from Ridge Avenue up to the Southern entrance of Forbidden Drive, so a fellow volunteer and I decided to ride our bikes up that way and spend the afternoon gathering as much trash as we could. Many trail users thanked us that day as we cleaned the park, and I hope we can encourage people to “leave no trace” when they come to visit Wissahickon Valley Park.

Sophorn Choup-Duggan

I first discovered the Wissahickon in the summer of 2012 when a friend asked me to do a run on Forbidden Drive. Immediately, I felt drawn to the park’s boundless beauty of lush forests, rugged trails, and historic structures nestled within the boundaries of the City of Philadelphia. I’m fortunate to live close to the park, which offers convenient access for trail running and the opportunity to explore distinctive sections of the visually beautiful park. My favorite trail is the Yellow Trail on the Roxborough end, where the path is smooth and windy and hidden under canopied trees. In recent years, I found myself logging many running miles in the park, so I wanted to give back and help maintain the trails I used often. Also, I wanted to commit my time in any way possible by volunteering with Friends of the Wissahickon to do trail maintenance or simply picking up trash in the park. I felt it was important to share the beauty and love of the Wissahickon with others as much as I have over the years.

As long as people are coming to the park, we will always need folks to pitch in and help take care of this special place. If you’re interested in getting involved and taking an active role in keeping the park clean and beautiful, get started by going to fow.org/wissahero for the details. It’s easy to get involved, a great way to spend time outdoors, a perfect way to fulfill Weaver’s Way hours, and, best of all, you’ll be actively making the park a better place. As the saying goes, “Not all heroes wear capes.” Sometimes they just wear masks and carry trash grabbers.

Photos submitted by Wissaheroes
There’s Still Time to Enter
The All Trails Challenge

It’s been a winning fall weather-wise, so what better time to earn miles for the 5th Annual All Trails Challenge while stewarding Wissahickon Valley Park. The Challenge ends December 1, so there is still plenty of time to participate.

Speaking of winning, all ATC challengers are entered to win these top prizes...and more.

Grand Prize
(minimum raised $5,000)

Every ATC participant that completes all 50 miles of trails in Wissahickon Valley Park is entered into a drawing for a weekend stay at a resort in the Poconos (good for next year). Take time to hang out in the great outdoors, ski, or enjoy the waterpark in the summer! Every 50 miles of trail completed equals one drawing entry!

Second Place
(minimum raised $2,500)

Outdoor entertainment with a mini projector and 100” screen

Third Place
(minimum raised $1,000)

A new Fitbit Versa 2

Fourth Place
(minimum raised $500)

Outdoor portable game sets

Every ATC participant that completes all 50 miles of trails in Wissahickon Valley Park is entered into a drawing for a weekend stay at a resort in the Poconos (good for next year). Take time to hang out in the great outdoors, ski, or enjoy the waterpark in the summer! Every 50 miles of trail completed equals one drawing entry!

All challengers that raise a minimum of $100 are invited to an exclusive virtual Happy Hour with perks from a local brewery.

All challengers that raise or donate $50 get FOW membership benefits (including the Wissahickon Valley Park map) and an invite to the virtual ATC Closing Party in December.

The number of participants taking the Challenge so far this year is nearly double that of the 2019 total, tracking with the significant increase in park visitation throughout the pandemic. A number of Challengers have also become WissaHeroes (see p. 3), FOW’s self-guided cleanup campaign. Whatever the reason, the Wissahickon is always there as a place to improve our mental and physical health. After all, it just feels good to get away from our at-home offices and classrooms and move our bodies.
After a month of construction improvements throughout August and September, the “Monster” Trail reopened, safer and more sound.

The steep, rocky “Monster,” on the Yellow Trail heading south from West Bell’s Mill Road, is favored by park users who enjoy both a physical and technical challenge. It is one of five trails scheduled for improvement as FOW looks to complete its Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI), a multiyear campaign designed to restore and preserve an environmentally and socially sustainable trail system in the Wissahickon Valley Park and serve the ever-growing community of visitors.

The extensive work involved armoring parts of the trail to stabilize the tread and reduce erosion, while maintaining the current challenging alignment. Benefits of the reroute project:

- Improve the overall park user experience by ensuring that trails are resilient to erosion impacts, while allowing for moderate to heavy use
- Reduce stormwater runoff and the movement of sediment into the Wissahickon Creek, which will improve water quality
- Stop the loss of forest soils and minimize damage to existing habitat, while improving its quality by removing invasive plants in the project area and replacing them with native plants.
- Reduce future trail stewardship costs

Many thanks to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, PECO Green Region, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, and Paul W. Steinbeiser Inc. Landscape Design & Construction for helping FOW complete this STI project.
Pandemic or not, you can’t beat ice cream on a hot August day. Although FOW couldn’t gather in person this year to enjoy these two traditions, we held the 14th Annual Ice Cream Social—at a Distance instead, with great success. More than 450 people signed up—three times the usual participants at this event—for coupons to receive free ice cream and water ice. Thanks to these businesses in our Wissahickon Valley community who scooped cold treats for our neighbors: Bredenbeck’s, Cedars House Café, Chloe’s Corner, Michael’s Water Ice, Tranzilli’s Real Italian Water Ice, Trolley Car Café, Valley Green Inn, and Zsa’s Ice Cream. FOW was happy to contribute to them to show our support during this difficult time.

Above: A 6abc reporter interviewed Trolley Car Café Manager Jasmine Fields about participating in the Ice Cream Social—at a Distance event, and he also spoke with FOW’s own Development Director Sarah Marley.
A Conversation with
Jeffrey Vakil, MD, Chestnut Hill Hospital

With the Prophecy Creek in the upper Wissahickon Watershed practically in his yard, Dr. Jeffrey Vakil is a regular on the nearby trails, but the FOW member also loves exploring new trails in the Wissahickon Valley Park with his wife, their two daughters, and their pair of dogs. Dr. Vakil, a Premier Orthopaedics surgeon, specializes in primary and revision hip and knee joint replacement at Chestnut Hill Hospital. He is a graduate of Jefferson Medical College and completed his orthopaedic residency at Drexel University School of Medicine. He then took a Joint Reconstruction fellowship at Johns Hopkins University, where he learned the anterior approach to hip replacement surgery. He is currently one of only a handful of surgeons in the Philadelphia region using this innovative, minimally invasive approach to hip replacement, performing this procedure more than 1,200 times over the last 11 years.

Chestnut Hill Hospital is the proud presenting sponsor of FOW’s 5th Annual All Trails Challenge. Whether you’re taking the Challenge this year, or simply wanting to spend more time in the Wissahickon, Dr. Vakil provides the following tips for a safe workout:

Q. What is the most common cause of exercise injuries when you’re out on the trail?
A. Certainly, working out beyond your skill and condition level can lead to problems, but from an orthopedic standpoint, stretching and warming up are key to building stamina and avoiding injury. Stretching for a few minutes before exercising gets blood flowing to muscles, which primes them for the upcoming activity and reduces the risk of pulls or tears. Therefore, make this essential practice a habit, no matter what your fitness level.

Stretching all the muscle groups in your legs—your calf muscles, hamstrings, knees, quadriceps—as well as the inner thigh and groin areas—is especially important if you’re walking or running. Strengthen and get the blood flowing in your arms with a few simple windmills and don’t forget to warm up your lower back with side- and backbends. (There are a variety of video resources online that demonstrate how to properly perform these simple warm-up routines.) End your workout session by slowly repeating the warm-up movements for a gentle cooldown.

Q. How can I avoid doing too much, too soon?
A. If you are new to or have been away from exercising, start slow, with just a half mile to a mile and work your way up. The rule of thumb is to do one 30-minute activity or a few five-minute walks per day. Your goal is to increase metabolic activities for your muscles, joints, and bones, as well as your heart, and to decrease sitting time, which is extraordinarily important. It’s best to start out on a flat, even surface like Forbidden Drive. Listen to your body. If it hurts when you do something, stop. If you experience significant soreness the next day, you probably overdid it. And don’t forget to hydrate with water, and lots of it; it’s a fundamental component of any fitness regimen.

Q. From an orthopedic surgeon’s perspective, what accessories can increase stability on the trails?
A. I tell my patients that comfort and stability are important safety assets. Proper, well-fitting shoes can enhance endurance and footing (pun intended) to avoid injury. Be sure to wear lightweight, supportive footwear that is suited to your feet. For example, for my patients with flatfoot deformities, I recommend orthotic inserts. Also, wear the right shoes for the right terrain—my family and I own both trail and hiking shoes. To gain even more stability, consider buying walking poles, which can assist with balance, especially on rocky or uneven trails.

Q. What should I know about wearing a mask and exercising in the Wissahickon?
A. The guidelines about masks in the park are the same as anywhere else: when in public settings around other people who are not in your family, wearing a mask is essential. So is wearing it properly—I can’t emphasize enough that it must cover your nose and mouth, not hang on your chin or around your neck. If you and your group are alone on a trail, you can remove the mask, but put it back on if someone approaches. Of course, stay six feet apart from people you don’t live with or who aren’t part of your “bubble”—be considerate and share the trail. And, if you’re feeling ill, skip the park visit.

Regular physical activity should be a part of everyone’s life. Any activity is better than none at all. The spectacular Wissahickon is a great place to get moving.
It was a long, hot, and strange summer in the Wissahickon. COVID-19 dealt the park a two-part punch: severely limiting our volunteer operations while simultaneously bringing in a huge increase of visitors. Fortunately, FOW and our impressive community of volunteers have found creative solutions to continue our stewardship mission in small individual ways.

Ever conscious of COVID-19 precautions, our trained Crew Leaders worked on a range of tasks throughout the park, including an entire parkwide assessment, clearing the corridor and sightlines on the 50+ miles of trails, cleanups, removing down trees from trails, and much more. Last year’s Volunteer of the Year David Bower spent the entire season stewarding the Thomas Mansion section of the park and used this time to mentor (from a safe distance) some of our newest Crew Leaders, including the herculean Dave Stehman, who single-handedly cleaned most of the west side of the park. Existing Crew Leaders Lisa Stout, Trisch Betcher, Kaitlyn Evan, and Lisa Myers continue to be an inspiration during this difficult time and showcase some of the best qualities anyone could offer.

Our trained Trail Ambassadors (TAs) have formed small groups to run regular cleanups in high-use areas of the park, as well as perform small outreach sessions along Forbidden Drive. It’s been wonderful to see TAs across-the-board continue to take care of the park, from veterans like Sarah West and Mary Phalan, to impressive new members like Greg Zarro, Amy Yuter, and Kate Charles, who have done the triple threat of cleanups, outreach shifts, and biking shifts along Forbidden Drive. TA John Deckop has been making his way through the park, cleaning and repainting trail signs while also removing graffiti.

Finally, with limited ability to run regular group cleanups during our busiest season, FOW launched the Wissahero campaign, encouraging all park users to lend a hand by organizing their own safe cleanups with members of their households. Read more about this popular program on p. 3.

As autumn continues, we are moving into the second phase of our in-park volunteer activities. Crew Leaders will start meeting more regularly to work on the trails, and Trail Ambassadors will begin hiking shifts. FOW will resume Volunteer Service Days that will be open to the public but with reduced capacities and increased safety protocols. Be sure to check out our Upcoming Volunteer Service Days page for more information.

New Crew Leaders Jim Dugan and Kristina Victoreen help remove fallen tree limbs at Thomas Mansion.

On a beautiful September day, Anne Williams was one of 78 volunteers who filled 126 bags of trash at the 50th anniversary of Wissahickon Trails’ Annual Wissahickon Creek Cleanup, which FOW co-hosted. Postponed from its usual spring timing due to COVID-19, the event helps keep litter and debris out of the vital Wissahickon Creek, which contributes to clean drinking water for a third of Philadelphians.
Up at the Tree House . . .

By Christina Moresi, Wissahickon Environmental Center

Up at the Tree House, we had a unique summer. We all know the pandemic shut down programming, but the effect of the shutdown was something we never expected: negativity early on in the form of litter, vandalism, and theft felt overwhelming. Then, the most devastating news came that camp was canceled. This would be the first time in 13 years that I didn’t teach camp and only the second time that the Tree House cancelled camp in its history. (The first time was due to previous budget cuts.) I struggled to see the bright side while my teammates and other nature colleagues were experiencing all the same frustrations. How could I survive a whole summer without “my kids”?! But time moved on, as it does, and so did I.

Each of us at the Tree House experienced a summer in the Andorra Meadow that we never had before. It began with our new Philadelphia Orchard Project Food Forest (like an orchard, but with more “snackable” plants). Weeding, sheet mulching, mowing, planting, and hand watering trees took up most of June. The excitement of our orchard dreams began to open our eyes to a future of possibilities and the fun of a less structured summer.

My big adventure was beekeeping. Our long-time beekeeper retired two years ago, but a feral honeybee colony moved into an empty hive. For the health of the bees and the orchard, they needed to be checked on. I have studied, observed, and even taught others about honeybees and their hives, but I never had the courage to be the caretaker of a colony. With the encouragement of beekeeping friends, and a visit from local beekeeper James Romanchek, the hive was opened and inspected, and we discovered that all the beauty and mystery inside the hive was healthy and sweet. There are now two hives in the orchard. The other is managed by Kate Brown of Northwestern Stables. In the spring, native beehives will be added to encourage a diverse bee population to pollinate the Food Forest.

Trish Fries’ (WEC Grounds and Facilities Maintenance Worker) worked extra hard this summer cleaning up after people and the storms. While removing litter was not a high point of his summer, chainsawing trees was exciting. Joining Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and Friends of the Wissahickon tree crews throughout the Wissahickon, Verland practiced his chain-saw skills and learned a plethora of new ones. But his favorite project this summer was planting his first tree in our new Food Forest.

Together, we grew stronger as a team and enjoyed the time we had to experience our own, new Wissahickon. As environmental educators, we often teach on the platform of children needing unstructured nature play. In fact, we modeled a whole program series around it called Kids Explore. This summer, we discovered that we (all adults, actually) also needed unstructured time in nature. Each morning we made fluid plans for the day, but while we worked, we also had the time to observe things we would usually be too busy to see, such as:

- The fox that would stop by the bird feeders as Verland filled them.
- The eight-point buck that strolled through the Food Forest, seemingly checking out the real estate. (He will be disappointed when the deer fencing goes up.)
- The milk snake living in an empty beehive, only to be replaced by a garter snake a few weeks later.
- Plants we have never before noticed blooming.
- All the fledglings learning to fly.
- Lots of eastern box turtles in the meadow.
- Our first red salamander sighting.

While we are working on creating new programming and restructuring some favorites, we hope everyone takes the opportunity to spend time in nature this fall—and simply be.

Christina Moresi, M.Ed., is an Environmental Education Planner at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.

A red salamander was among the many nature sightings Tree House staff members observed during their unstructured summer.

Credit: Christina Moresi

Lenape speakers:

– Chief Emeritus Robert Redhawk Ruth
– Chief of Education & Language Shelley DePaul
– Ceremonial Chief Chuck Gentlemoon
– Storykeeper & Council Member Adam DePaul

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 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.

Lenape speakers:

– Chief Emeritus Robert Redhawk Ruth
– Chief of Education & Language Shelley DePaul
– Ceremonial Chief Chuck Gentlemoon
– Storykeeper & Council Member Adam DePaul

A Zoom link will be provided to those who register for this event.
When I think about Weavers Way Co-op and Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW), I know that I am a better human being because both create my and our community’s third places. A third place joins the usual two social environments—home first and workplace second—as essential social surroundings that enhance the quality of our lives.

You may be questioning how such seemingly different organizations, one a community-based, member-owned and -operated business, the other the steward of the magnificent Wissahickon Valley Park, can fill the same role in our community. In fact, both are places where we find camaraderie among friends and neighbors, engage in interesting conversations, or, sometimes, in the case of the Wissahickon, conduct silent chats with ourselves.

Weavers Way Co-op provides a small-town shopping experience where, even masked, we are comforted by recognition from the staff and our neighbors. Both the Wissahickon and the Co-op give us a much-welcomed sense of normalcy. FOW works tirelessly to provide a wild experience, an oasis of natural comfort in the midst of a big city and the chaotic world of a pandemic.

In Weavers Way Co-op, we can walk the aisles and hear friendly voices sharing stories, which often creates a feeling of community that reminds us we are doing the best we can under the circumstances. In the Wissahickon, we can spend hours meandering among the trees and flowers, close to the sounds of water and birds, and not hear any sounds of the city. Truly awesome and awe-striking!

The Co-op maintains two farms, one at Awbury Arboretum and the other at W. B. Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences. Pre-pandemic (and, I expect, post-pandemic) you could have a rural experience walking through gardens and fields where some of the food we grow is sold at our stores and the Henry Got Crops Farm Market.

Weavers Way offers workshops, led by our neighbors, and volunteer work opportunities in our stores, at the farm, and with FOW and other community-based organizations. Weavers Way is a founding organization of the Village Fair, which was cancelled this year. At the fair, neighbors stroll the 500 and 600 blocks of Carpenter Lane where the Co-op began over 40 years ago, amid craft artists, musicians and dancers, and vendors selling homegrown, local foods.

FOW’s ongoing opportunities for environmental learning and nature discovery have continued throughout the pandemic with lots of online “Virtual Valley” content. Trail Ambassador hikes and volunteer service day opportunities are beginning to resume in small groups. Popular events, such as the annual All Trails Challenge and this year’s Ice Cream Social—at a Distance continue.

As third places, Weavers Way Co-op and FOW reinforce that where we live is special and unique. We have a responsibility to assure that these resources weather the pandemic and that we come out on the other side, all the better because of what they mean to us. Therefore, let’s replenish these spaces by treating each other with respect and compassion when we meet in Weavers Way stores and in the Wissahickon. At the Co-op, let’s be even more understanding that these are trying times and stress can bring out behaviors that don’t reflect our best selves. In the park, always bring a bag for litter, leave no trace that you have been there, take no natural samples home, and be respectful of everyone’s right to be there. Together, we can continue to benefit from our community’s third places and guarantee they will be here forever.

Shelly Brick is a Weavers Way staff member and an FOW Trail Ambassador.
The mission of Let’s Go Outdoors is to engage city communities in outdoor experiences—especially in their own neighborhoods. So, when co-directors Tarsha and Keisha Scovens learned that Philadelphia Parks & Recreation was looking for partners to enhance its 50-year-old Playstreets summer programming, they jumped on the opportunity. On small, one-way streets tucked in the neighborhoods of Cobbs Creek, Kensington, Gray’s Ferry, and East Germantown, they turned nature lessons into play for eager children ranging in ages from about five to 12. With binoculars they searched for birds, identified different types of grasses and flowers, and went on scavenger hunts to compare natural versus manmade items. Let’s Go Outdoors staff led conversations about the area’s two rivers and nearby waterways, and the kinds of fish that might live there. They helped the children make connections between the environment and where they play and gather outside—right where they live.

This fall Let’s Go Outdoors is co-launching (with Let’s Go 1-2-3) two outdoor activities intended to help children build skills while motivating personal goal setting:

• In September, they began geocaching at Awbury Arboretum. In this outdoor, socially distanced family activity, children learn to use a handheld GPS device as they go on a “hide and find” hunt around the park. More broadly, it is designed to teach them about pinpointing a desired direction in their personal lives and navigating a daily course to achieve it.

• Tarsha, Keisha, and three team members recently received Level 1 Archery Instructor Certification so they can launch their newest program called Reaching Your Targets. The vision behind the name: “reaching” people in underserved communities to help them aim for a “target” and then apply the targeted goal to improve their lifestyle and/or the environment. The program is expected to start in October.

Join Let’s Go Outdoors for Halloween fun at their Trash or Cache Beginner Geocaching event on October 31 at Houston Meadow, Saylor Grove, and Blue Bell Park from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Register here.

Let’s Go Outdoors co-director Tarsha Scovens talks about fish in local waterways at a Playstreets program in the Belfield neighborhood near East Germantown. Credit: Keisha Scovens

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION...

In the summer newsletter, FOW announced stepping up efforts to make the Wissahickon feel welcoming for all, not just those of privilege. The first step in this process of dismantling systemic racism is education. We invite you to join us as we educate ourselves on how people of color experience the outdoors. Here are some resources we have found helpful (click on on the links below):

**Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors** by Carolyn Finney

**Melanin Base Camp**
The goal of this website is to increase the visibility and representation of outdoorsy black, indigenous, people of color.

**The Avarna Group for Justice + Equity + Diversity + Inclusion**
Offers a free searchable resources database of readings, tool kits, podcasts, videos, and activities and activities to promote social and environmental justice.


**Diverse Environmental Leaders Speakers Bureau**
Let’s Go Outdoors’ Tarsha and Keisha Scovens are on this list of diverse thinkers and innovators in the environmental community, many of whom are participating in podcasts and online events.

**American Hiking Society**
Resources on racism in the outdoors

**The Joy Trip Project: Anti-Racism in Our National Parks - the Video**
To mark the 104th anniversary of the National Park Service, a distinguish panel of experts gathered to bring their thoughts and lived experiences to explore the long history and future of Black people as stewards of our public land.

“What is ‘Intersectional Environmentalism’?” by Leah Thomas


**Philadelphia Inquirer** - “The Great Outdoors Isn’t Always Great for Everyone” by Helen Ubiñas

**Science Careers** - Profile of scientist #BlackBirdersWeek organizer Corina Newsome on the challenges she has experienced as a Black scientist who works outdoors.

“Birding While Black: J. Drew Lanham on Race, Belonging, and a Love of Nature” by J. Drew Lanham
Valley Green Inn:

WEATHERING STORMS AND COVID-19

Valley Green Inn’s (VGI) unique location along Forbidden Drive in the Wissahickon Valley Park presents both challenges and opportunities for Jack Ott, who has served as proprietor of the historic, award-winning inn for the past 22 years.

When your business is surrounded by trees and water, you can’t help but become something of a storm tracker. High winds can threaten to knock down trees and power lines. During a hard rain, Jack keeps a close watch on the water level in the Wissahickon Creek, having observed many times that while it rises fast, it fortunately recedes just as quickly. Still, after the 170-year-old VGI flooded in 2011 after several previous instances, Jack and FOW put safeguards in place to mitigate the risk of water flowing into the building. He installed sump pumps under the patio and basement, and purchased a back-up generator to prevent power loss.

“We lived through it and learned from the experience,” said Jack, noting that even this past summer’s Tropical Storm Laura left only a little water in the basement. He credits the success of these and similar maintenance actions, which help him keep VGI open in all kinds of weather, to strong partnerships with Friends of the Wissahickon, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, and the Philadelphia Water Department.

Trying to run a restaurant and event facility in the midst of a pandemic continues to be a learning experience for Jack, as he works to creatively adapt to changing conditions and city and state regulations. While even two decades at VGI did not prepare him for the challenges of COVID-19, the Inn’s physical location and existing set-up have proven to be advantageous. Once VGI reopened after the initial lockdown, the front porch was already there to easily socially distance patrons with reduced seating. Weddings, although fewer and much smaller than usual, still continue on the covered patio, which is now serving double duty for expanded outdoor dining options. To further extend VGI’s seating and define its footprint, FOW crews built a fenced-in area, where people can safely and comfortably distance while enjoying food or an event—and, of course, the view.

As other restaurants consider how or whether to heat the outdoor areas they created in response to COVID-19, VGI has always had portable heaters in theirs. Likewise, takeout has been a long-standing alternative, while the snack window continues to be a welcome asset for accommodating the larger than normal number of visitors seeking solace in the park. In response to this increased traffic and to increase VGI’s accessibility during the pandemic, Jack added all-day menus and eliminated the break between lunch and dinner. Since indoor dining resumed on September 8, allowing 25 percent capacity, Jack continues to be creative and flexible in order to meet demand while following required protocols to keep diners and staff safe.

What keeps Jack going, despite a pandemic, is serving generations of families who have made countless memories at VGI. COVID-19 may have tested VGI, but it hasn’t kept people away, for which Jack considers himself lucky, and he is grateful. He looks forward to helping people create new memories, whether it’s for an anniversary dinner or other special occasion. In fact, 2021 is already booked for more weddings than ever.

FOW members get a 10 percent discount at VGI.
WORD SEARCH
They can be found hiding in the cluster of letters to the left. They are either horizontal, vertical, or diagonal ... and some are even backwards!

Rocks & Minerals of the Wissahickon

- Biotite
- Chlorite
- Feldspar
- Garnet
- Gneiss
- Granite
- Iron Oxide
- Kyanite
- Magnetite
- Metamorphic
- Mica
- Muscovite
- Pegmatite
- Quartz
- Schist
- Shale
- Slate
- Staurolite
- Talc
- Tourmaline

CONNECT THE DOTS & COLOR

Good morning, Wissahickon Valley Park.

Good morning, bald eagle, soaring above the creek. Are we ready to share a wonderful day?
WORD SEARCH

They can be found hiding in the cluster of letters to the left. They are either horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and some are even backwards!

Rocks & Minerals of the Wissahickon

BIOTITE
CHLORITE
FELDSPAR
GARNET
GNEISS
GRANITE
IRON OXIDE
KYANITE
MAGNETITE
METAMORPHIC
MICA
MUSCOVITE
PEGMATITE
QUARTZ
SCHIST
SHALE
SLATE
STAUROLITE
TALC
TOURMALINE

FOX’S SCAVENGER HUNT

Go for a hike this fall in the Wissahickon Valley Park (try the All Trails Challenge) and help Fox find everything on his list.

Directions:
1. Cut along the dotted lines.
2. Punch holes through the white circles
3. Cut a piece of string measured to fit around your head.
4. Tie the ends of the string to each of the holes.
5. Wear and enjoy!

ACORN  MAPLE LEAF  SQUIRREL  BRIDGE
GOOSE  BIRD BOX  FERN  WATERFALL
FUNGI  HORSE  FLOWER  TOAD
TRICK-OR-TRASH
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31
9 A.M.–12:00 P.M.

FOW’s self-guided Trick-or-Trash cleanup is a fun and easy way to get out in the park, socially distance, and make a positive impact in the Wissahickon.

- 10 locations to choose from (registration is required).
- Volunteers need to wear a face cover and supply their own gloves. Trash bags will be available at each site meet-up location.
- After the cleanup, complete this short field report by 2 p.m. for FOW to properly log volunteer hours and trash totals. FOW will send a confirmation email with a coupon for a free treat bag to redeem that day from The Cedars House, where judging for a Scarecrow Contest will be held at 12 p.m.
- Costumes are highly recommended! Submit photos with your field report to be entered in a contest on social media for top adult and child costumes after the event.

Presenting sponsor

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.