Conserving the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley for 96 years

Friends of the Wissahickon

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“Forbidden Bathroom” Photo by Hunter Nichols
First Place, Structures, Biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest 2020
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What a year it’s been! There have been many challenges to be sure, but many successes as well. In being proactive and flexible, FOW discovered ways to turn potential obstacles into opportunities that have ultimately strengthened our outreach, development, and stewardship.

Technology has played an integral role in FOW’s ability to not only keep going but be innovative along the way. First and foremost, it enabled staff to safely work remotely and streamlined a number of office operations. Applying technology to FOW’s operations and programs has allowed us to keep productivity high and use resources more efficiently, while connecting with more park visitors than ever before.

No traditional information tables? No problem. FOW launched a free digital map app that offers an interactive map of the Wissahickon Valley Park. It also provides information on trails, park amenities, and points of interest (in both English and Spanish), along with tips for an enjoyable park visit, all from the palm of your hand.

As the pandemic continued, we learned how to adapt our stewardship practices to align with best safety protocols for getting the work done, whether through safely distanced in small groups or through solo stewardship via our Wissaheroes campaign.

In being proactive and flexible, we discovered ways to turn potential obstacles into opportunities that have ultimately strengthened our outreach, development, and stewardship.

You can become a citizen scientist through a new initiative that grew out of our Ecological Land Management plan. By simply collecting data on select plants and animals while you are out in the woods this winter, you will be helping FOW foster the diverse habitat that calls the park home. Learn more on p. 6.

Going digital has made our educational programming more accessible than ever. Cases in point: Our Virtual Valley online resource for nature education and, more recently, our virtual fall Valley Talk on the “The Past and Present of the Lenape in Pennsylvania,” which was attended by more than 350 people. This format accommodated a larger audience than we could have ever hosted in person, at less cost, allowing us to invest those resources in the park. Read the recap article on p. 4 about the history and culture of our stewardship partners, the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania.

This year we developed a broader, deeper understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice across the work we do, from internal operations to how visitors experience the park. As FOW heads into 2021, we look forward to supporting and learning from partners old and new who are experts in this field.

Anticipating another year of high volume visitoship, FOW plans to hire six seasonal field crew members—double the usual number before COVID-19 with double the impact (p. 3). Although seasonal, the crew plays an important role in educating visitors about the Wissahickon Valley Park and Leave No Trace principles to help everyone have an enjoyable park experience.

We close out the year with congratulations: to the winners of our Biennial Photo Contest (p. 10), a photo from whom graces this newsletter’s cover; to the participants in the Fifth Annual All Trails Challenge (p. 8), who helped raise $37,651 to make the park a better place, and to our amazing volunteers who we recognized virtually for their endless contributions (p. 13) to FOW’s mission. And to our dedicated community who continued to support us throughout a year like no other, I offer a grateful, heartfelt thank you.

On behalf of all of us at FOW, I wish you health, hope, healing, and a Happy New Year!

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
FROM THE FIELD

FOW is preparing for work on the Lavender Trail Gully North Restoration project. It 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.

To collect real-time data on soil conditions both before and after the restoration project, FOW has installed five soil moisture sensors along the gully. Understanding current soil moisture capacity will inform FOW about plant health and soil conditions, factors that contribute to erosion. This data is key for following major weather events when the soil is most saturated and ideal for measuring stormwater absorption rates.

FOW is collaborating on this work with environmental software company Temboo, which has created a custom data visualization platform that will aggregate other open source data observed from a weather gauge. Staff and volunteers will also be able to take pictures of the current conditions and upload them to be viewable alongside data tables.

Chestnut Hill Conservancy is providing the necessary Wi-Fi connection and housing a small receiver for collecting the data from the sensors.

GIVING TUESDAY

During a typical summer season, FOW’s three seasonal field crew members make a huge difference in the Wissahickon, assisting at volunteer cleanups, providing extra hands on improvement projects, and educating visitors about the park and Leave No Trace principles. In 2019, for example, they engaged with 1,341 park visitors, removed more than 1,500 pounds of trash, and built .6 miles of trail.

Then came COVID-19, and FOW was unable to hire these valuable individuals even as the park experienced unprecedented visitation. However, thanks to the generosity of our friends on Giving Tuesday on December 1, FOW was able to raise a total of $35,000—more than sufficient funds to not only hire a seasonal crew, but to double their impact. We’ll be bringing on six individuals instead of three, for five months instead of three, to ensure that no matter how busy the park gets, all visitors will have a welcoming, enjoyable experience.

Current condition of Lavender Gully North, in need of stabilization.
Walking the Lenape Way

More than 350 people joined FOW’s virtual Valley Talk in October to hear Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania council members discuss “The Past and Present of the Lenape in Pennsylvania.” The ease of online programming makes it possible to attract an audience of this size, but the real draw was the clear popularity of this important topic.

The Lenape are the indigenous people of Eastern Pennsylvania, Southern New York, New Jersey, and Northern Delaware. The Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing awareness of Lenape history while continuing the preservation and revival of the language and cultural traditions.

Adam Waterbear DePaul, the Nation’s storykeeper and one of the evening’s speakers, said that FOW’s program captured the essence of the “Fourth Crow” era from the Lenape legend “The Prophecy of the Fourth Crow.” The story, passed down through the family of another Valley Talk speaker Chief Robert Redhawk Ruth, relays the Lenape Nation’s decades-long struggle to survive and keep their community and culture intact. Basically, it goes like this:

The First Crow was the Lenape before the coming of the Europeans. The Second Crow symbolized the death and destruction of their culture. During the Third Crow, the people went “underground,” hiding their identity. The Fourth Crow was the Lenape becoming caretakers again and working with everybody to restore this land.

“Programs like FOW’s help us develop a broader community by enabling us to tell the Lenape story and what we’re doing today, and foster new partnerships with interested audiences, who can then engage others.”

Preserving the Land Through the Rising Nation River Journey and the Treaty of Renewed Friendship

The Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania launched the Rising Nation River Journey in 2002, initially in response to increasing pollution in the Lenape Sipu—Delaware River—and to engage like-minded individuals and organizations such as FOW to join them in addressing the problem. They invited them to sign a Treaty of Renewed Friendship that acknowledges the Lenape’s traditions and the Nation as stewards of their ancestral homeland. FOW was among the first signers and continues a close partnership with the Lenape Nation.

Every four years, the public is invited to participate in the River Journey and sign the Treaty (at the event or online). DePaul, coordinator of the next ceremony in August 2022, will begin recruiting volunteers in the spring in preparation for the start of planning this summer. Interested groups and individuals should email DePaul at info@lenape-nation.org.

The River Journey’s key message is about stewardship and protection, not ownership. As DePaul explained, “It’s a kind of reciprocity agreement from the standpoint of mutual respect and understanding between people and the environment.” Added Chief Redhawk Ruth, “We want people to understand our traditional way of conserving land by walking softly on the earth, whether it’s on a trail or by the Wissahickon Creek. It’s about keeping the natural harmony.”

Reviving the Language

Among the topics of interest at the Valley Talk was the ongoing revival of the Lenape language. Never written down, it was passed orally from person to person, but beyond a few dictionaries compiled by colonial linguists that either are inaccurate or mix dialects, the language essentially became extinct. However, Adam’s mother, Shelley DePaul, the Nation’s chief of education and language, is spearheading efforts to change that. A genealogical and historical researcher, she is a Lenape language specialist, who the University of Pennsylvania has credited as being one of only four people in the world who speaks Conversational Lenape. She has taught Lenape language classes at Swarthmore College for which she created the classroom textbook, the only one of its kind. Shelley is working to revive the class at Swarthmore; for now she is holding classes independently online, for which there is a waiting list.

Fun fact: The name Lenni Lenape, which many of us learned in school, is what Adam calls a “colonial linguistic blip.” Lenape means “original people,” so, while it’s not wrong per se, adding Lenni translates to “original original.”
Responding to Growing Interest

Due to time constraints, the following questions submitted during the Valley Talk were answered by Adam DePaul in a separate conversation:

—With recent concerns about being sensitive and politically correct, are you getting questions about how to do and say the right things?
Yes. If it’s done respectfully, it’s a genuine way to share thinking. We appreciate people asking questions and coming to a reputable source for answers. Always feel free to reach out to the Nation to get the best resources.

—How difficult is it to preserve your traditions and values during a time when cultural differences and environmental issues are seen as divisive?
While it can be difficult, in many ways it is also easier now than any time in our history. In the last decade or so, people’s social consciousness is more accepting and sensitive to native and minority issues. They’re more curious. In the last decade or so, we’ve been invited more places, asked to make more presentations, and have had more freedom to practice our ways and speak about them.

—How can I get notified about the River Journey and other Lenape activities going on in the area?
For general information about the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania’s history, ongoing engagement and support opportunities, and more, visit their website at lenape-nation.org. Check out their 1st Project page beginning this spring to learn more about becoming a Treaty signer, joining the Nation on the river, or simply being a spectator.

Ceremonial Chief Chuck Gentlemoon said at the Valley Talk that the ancestors tell the Lenape to take care of the universe because the universe takes care of us. “Be caretakers of each other for we are all one people. Keep moving forward so that the generations know who you are. And always say thank you. Wanishi”.

Watch the full Valley Talk on “The Past and Present of the Lenape in Pennsylvania” on FOW’s YouTube channel.

Dear Friends of the Wissahickon,

I want to thank each of you, on behalf of myself and of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania, for everything you do in acting as caretakers of our indigenous homelands. Land stewardship is, and always has been, one of the Lenape people’s primary concerns, and your efforts, initiatives, programs, and presentations embrace and foster our spirit of humility, respect, and appreciation for our environment.

We cherish our relationship with you, and look forward to continued collaborations, programs, and events.

Wanishi (thank you),

Adam Waterbear DePaul
Storykeeper & Tribal Council Member
Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania

William Penn’s Own Account of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians by J. William Penn

The Delaware Indians: A History by C.S. Weslager

Lenape Country: Delaware Valley Society before William Penn by Jean Soderlund

Mythology of the Lenape: Guide and Texts by John Bierhorst

Rainbow Crow: A Lenape Tale (Reading Rainbow Books) by Nancy Van Laan
HELPING FOW UNCOVER KEY HABITAT DATA

By Pauline Berkowitz, Capital Projects Coordinator

S
ince 2018, one of Friends of the Wissahickon’s three main priorities has been fostering an ecologically diverse and functional habitat in the Wissahickon Valley Park for the hundreds of species that depend on it. Thanks to the completion of the multi-year Ecological Land Management (ELM) Plan in spring 2020, in cooperation with researchers from the Drexel University’s Academy of Natural Sciences, FOW now has a comprehensive picture of just what calls the Wissahickon home.

A lot has changed in the park’s landscape over the past 20 years, including vastly increased use, and new stressors posed by climate change, including invasive pests and erratic weather events. That’s why it’s extremely important to have a current map of the park’s biodiversity as FOW works to combat these challenges. This project will shape how FOW takes care of the park for years to come, including engaging citizen scientists to collect habitat data throughout the park. This data will provide important knowledge about the Wissahickon’s biodiversity, enabling FOW to adapt best management practices based on current conditions and inform its future stewardship priorities.

“The Ecological Land Management Plan has provided us with a pretty good snapshot of the many biomes that make up the Wissahickon Valley Park, as well as the flora and fauna that occupy the various habitats within the park,” said Emily Daeschler, chair of FOW’s Habitat Committee. “When we know what lives where, we can be intentional in where we place our restoration projects for the biggest effects on critical species.”

A Picture of the Park’s Biodiversity

An important innovation in the ELM plan was to break up the park’s 1,800 acres into hydrologic management units (HMUs), each of which require different stewardship techniques. The park is comprised of 23 HMUs based on subwatersheds, or catchments, within the overall Wissahickon watershed, like Monoshone Creek and Valley Green Run. Most of the HMUs lie beyond park bounds, providing greater insight on how outside factors impact the Wissahickon’s forest and tributaries. It also identifies key plant and animal species in each unit to indicate its overall ecosystem health, as well as set out guidelines for preferred land management techniques for current and future use in the park. Finally, ELM designates areas of priority usage, so that humans and wildlife each have spaces to themselves in one of the following three categories:

• Areas of PRESERVATION, where we want to protect and maintain existing conditions
• Areas of RESTORATION, where we want to foster the appearance or resurgence of key species using specified land management practices
• Areas of ACCESS, where there are concentrations of park users, and habitat management priorities must be balanced against infrastructure needs

These area designations are anticipated to shift somewhat, based on observed trends, new habitat restoration projects, and new data - one of the most important pieces of ELM going forward.

Filling Data Gaps

Scientists from the Academy of Natural Sciences worked for nearly two years on assessing the Wissahickon’s habitats and gathering data on key indicator species, but there are still considerable data gaps in many areas. As the park’s biodiversity changes from year to year, continued assessment of ELM’s zones is also needed to determine the priority of FOW’s habitat restoration projects. Luckily, there’s an amazing tool to help make this a possibility: citizen science.

Citizen science is the collection of scientific data by amateur scientists and members of the public. With the rise of crowdsourcing, it’s easier than ever for people to participate in important scientific research. New apps like iNaturalist and eBird help users make identifications of species and contribute to large data sets that provide a clearer picture of biodiversity than ever before and can even account for changes in real time. And popular citizen science events, like the iNaturalist City Nature Challenge in April and the Audubon Christmas Bird Count have also been influential in getting a new generation of future naturalists involved in science.

Starting this year, FOW will be incorporating real-time seasonal data on indicator species and plants in several HMUs and encouraging volunteers and friends to assist with data collection (see how to participate in ELM’s data collection below). Eventually, FOW hopes to have a real-time picture of the park, which will help make scientifically informed stewardship decisions, such as placement of native plantings and stormwater infrastructure. “Data collecting for ELM on your phone is relatively easy, and it’s so important for the future of this space,” Daeschler said. “If you’re enjoying the park already, I urge you to look a little closer and explore a little deeper for science.”

Interested in Participating in Citizen Science for ELM?

The first data collection zone is the Valley Green area during the winter of 2020-2021. FOW’s Habitat Committee has compiled a list of seasonal flora, fauna, and fungi based on their ease of identification and prevalence at that time. Consider submitting some observations while on your winter walks to help FOW protect the Wissahickon’s habitat in coming years.

CLICK HERE to read the full ELM plan.
Habitat data collection zone for the Valley Green area.
AN ATC LIKE NO OTHER

The pandemic was no challenge for the 2020 All Trails Challenge (ATC). By the end of its four-month journey, the fifth annual event marked several milestones. The highest number of Challengers and donors combined forces to raise a record amount toward the conservation of Wissahickon Valley Park, while more participants than every completed all 50 miles.

ATC BY THE NUMBERS

Total money raised
$37,651

Total number of Challengers and donors
148 challengers and 407 supporters (including 14 Wissahero solo stewards)

Total miles completed
9,076.5

Challengers Completing All 50 Miles:
61

(Our sponsor, Chestnut Hill Brewing Co., is offering free beer and a free pizza to trekkers who can prove they finished the ATC.)

Thank you to our sponsors:
In a virtual awards ceremony on December 7, FOW recognized the top ATC participants and fundraisers, and announced the winners of a couple of surprise prizes.

**Top individual fundraiser:**
Janet Stern who raised a total of $1,450
She has been part of the ATC for all five years, travelling well over 50 miles each time.

**Top team fundraiser:**
Team Go MPMPPA who raised a total of $1,110
This new team hiked 269.5 miles.

**Top individual mileage:**
Bryce Poirot with a total of 1,051.9 miles
A regular jogger (no surprise!), he has covered the most miles and raised $700 for the Wissahicken.

**Top team mileage:**
Team Go MPMPPA who hiked 269.5 miles

**All individual ATC Challengers were entered into random drawings to win top prizes in categories based on dollars raised or mileage:** They are:

- **$1,000 minimum raised:**
  Fitbit Versa 2 - Mary Henry

- **$500 minimum raised:**
  Outdoor portable game sets – William Bender

- **Participants who completed all 50 miles:**
  Weekend stay at Skytop Lodge – Andy Wells (who is also a Wissahero)

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To all the participants and supporters, thank you for making our fifth ATC such a special one. Your contributions have made a profound impact on FOW’s ability to sustain our special urban oasis for current and future generations.

We’d love to see photos of your journey. Help us make next year’s event even better by completing this survey.
Announcing the

BIENNIAL PHOTO CONTEST

2020 WINNERS

The Biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest 2020 was the most successful to date, with more than 155 photographers submitting so many great photographs that our judges had a hard time selecting the winners. Landscape definitely seemed to be the favorite category this year. Friends of the Wissahickon presented the contest in partnership with Wissahickon Trails and the Woodmere Art Museum. Congratulations to the winners and thank you to everyone who submitted photos. Special thanks to the judges: Troy Bynum, a Mt. Airy naturalist and wildlife photographer; Brad Maule, FOW Instagram editor; Jamie Stewart, a nature photographer and event photographer for Wissahickon Trails; and Christina Warhola, Woodmere Art Museum’s Director of Communications.

BEST IN SHOW: Brian Maher, Wood Duck, Profile

WILDLIFE: Brian Maher, Kingfisher and Fall Foliage

YOUTH: Maddie Bergson-Conklin, Landscape

PEOPLE: Bill McGeeney, Ten Box Climbing Area with Kaitlyn Evans

LANDSCAPE: Mac Allen, Duality of Reality Next to the Walnut Lane Bridge on Forbidden Drive

PEOPLE’S CHOICE: Greg Off, Blue Stone Bridge over a Shallow Wissahickon Creek

STRUCTURES (newsletter cover photo): Hunter Nichols, Forbidden Bathroom

BEST IN SHOW: Brian Maher, Wood Duck, Profile
While FOW is the steward of Wissahickon Valley Park, its long-time community partner Mt. Airy CDC (Community Development Corporation) shares a similar sustainability and engagement mission for the Mt. Airy neighborhood that surrounds the park’s perimeters. Both organizations work to bring neighbors together and empower them to use, and contribute to the sustainability of, their respective public spaces.

Mt. Airy CDC was founded in 1980 as the Mt. Airy Village Development Corporation, an outgrowth of West Mt. Airy Neighbors (established in 1959) and East Mt. Airy Neighbors (started in 1966), whose members teamed up to rescue their shared business corridor – Germantown Avenue -- which had become blighted and dilapidated.

Initially, the organization focused on acquiring and rehabbing neglected commercial storefronts along the Avenue, transforming them into locally owned, income-producing properties. Over the years, that emphasis has evolved into a multi-faceted approach to developing a strong, vibrant Mt. Airy. In the 1990s, the organization became known as Mt. Airy USA and added housing counseling and financial literacy to its core initiatives that also include business services, real estate development, and community programs. Last year, to better reflect its work as a community development corporation, it rebranded as Mt. Airy CDC.

A prime example of Mt. Airy CDC’s work was the transformation of Lovett Park in 2017. Lovett Memorial Library is situated on a property that also includes an approximately one-acre park. Mt. Airy CDC partnered with Fairmount Park Conservancy to revitalize the underutilized space, turning it into a true neighborhood asset with activities and events designed to bring neighbors together, such as the Monday Market, Moonlight Movies, Yoga in the Park, book drives, and more. Executive Director Brad Copeland said Lovett Park was a demonstration project about seeing the potential in public spaces, how to increase access, and the importance of promoting a sense of community ownership.

Such public-facing programs raise awareness about what groups in the community are doing and shine a light on the thriving community assets that exist around the edges of the Wissahickon. In this way, Mt. Airy CDC most directly touches FOW’s work.

“We recognize the need for partnerships and collaborations to create social cohesion in the neighborhood and build neighborly bonds,” said Copeland. “It’s how we get meaningful work done.”

Neighbors gather at one of Mt. Airy CDC’s Go Mt. Airy Market events in Lovett Park for an evening of live music, art vendors, food trucks, and beer garden in summer 2019. Photo Credit: Bradley Maule

FOW has engaged Mt. Airy CDC to partner on a number of community endeavors, from providing teams of volunteers to staff one of the 10 park trailhead sites at last year’s Super Mega Volunteer Service Day and at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service at Thomas Mansion, to playing an integral role in helping connect FOW with local businesses for this year’s Ice Cream Social at a Distance and with neighbors for discussions about Devil’s Pool.

Obviously, COVID-19 has temporarily halted Mt. Airy CDC’s public programming, and, like most organizations, they are thinking about how to manage the challenges that lie ahead.

“The pandemic provided a window into how important collaboration and partnership is and how reliant we all are on each other in contributing to the health of public spaces,” Copeland said.

Mt. Airy CDC is the parent organization of Go Mt. Airy, an initiative launched in 2012 to support the Go Mt. Airy Business Association and Mt. Airy CDC’s partner organizations in Mt. Airy. The vision is to help promote, educate, and sustain local businesses through a number of channels, including networking events, workshops, and other activities through @GoMtAiry social media channels, newsletters, and more.
In spite of the challenges 2020 has presented us, FOW’s volunteers have truly risen to the challenge of stewarding the park we all love so much. Individuals have continued to take part in self-led cleanups through the Wissaheroes program. One stand-out event was the Trick-or-Trash cleanup on Halloween morning for which FOW concentrated on 10 different locations throughout the park. Seeing no reason to cancel a chance to have fun, FOW encouraged volunteers to wear Halloween costumes and awarded prizes for the best one. (Winners were Kristina Victoreen as a spotted lanternfly and Madelyn Hill as a witch.) A total of 78 volunteers removed 51.5 bags of “spooky litter” from the park.

FOW has been able to keep its Volunteer Service Days safely running by adapting to smaller groups and increased safety precautions. Tuesday and Thursday mornings have been dedicated to small group stewardship in the park. These stalwart volunteers have removed litter, cut back invasive overgrowth, cleared drains on the sides of Forbidden Drive and closed rogue trails. They also spent a lot of time cleaning around the historic Rex Avenue Bridge by removing soil, clearing drains, and scraping debris off the iconic stone steps of the Orange Trail.

2019 Volunteer of the Year, David Bower (who has completed over 660 hours in 2020), has continued to lead work on Wednesday mornings at Thomas Mansion and at Historic Rittenhouse Town. Saturdays have been busy with volunteers accomplishing deeds such as planting 68 native trees on the hillside of The Monster (northern terminus of the Yellow Trail). The annual Fall Love Your Park event took place at the Thomas Mansion/Clifford Park section of the park, where two separate groups cut back invasive vegetation and vines.

Congratulations to James Tanner who completed his Eagle Scout project by building 30 habitat boxes with his fellow scouts. Together, they installed 18 new boxes in Andorra Meadow. Thank you, James, for providing our native birds with new places to nest.

We were also joined by a group organized by Ryan Moore to remember a good friend (and lover of the Wissahickon) Andrew Lee, who passed away last year. With this group, we cleaned up around the Kitchen’s Lane Bridge, removing debris, cutting back vines, and other invasive plant species.

FOW’s trained Crew Leaders have kept busy by co-leading our Volunteer Service Days and assisting us with various projects throughout the park. With this hearty crew, we assisted our friends at the Wissahickon Environmental Center by installing a large fence around the new food forest orchard project behind the Tree House. Crew Leader Kaitlyn Evans organized a small group to build raised stepping stones on the Orange Trail north of Bella Mill Road to replace the boardwalk that washed out in a recent hurricane. Crew Leader Dan Mercer has continued to finish up the newly built bike skills loops adjacent to Saylor Grove, and oversaw a re-routed section of trail next to Monastery Stables.

FOW’s trained Trail Ambassadors have been out on the trails (in small groups), keeping their eyes on the park, providing outreach to park users, and cleaning up litter. Many of these TAs have been regulars at our Volunteer Service Days, providing muscle power and helping check in volunteers.

FOW staff are currently planning for 2021, which will hopefully be an easier year for everyone. In lieu of recruiting new Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders, we will be running refresher training sessions for existing volunteers. Keep your eyes peeled on the volunteering section of FOW’s website for more information on ways to get involved.

Ready to collect “spooky litter” at the Halloween Trick-or-Trash cleanup are (from left) Alexis Ritter, Jon McCabe, and Brad Maule.
Like so many things this year, our annual night of celebrating the accomplishments of volunteers moved to a virtual format. As of the end of November, more than 500 individual volunteers had put in over 8,400 volunteer hours! Along with highlighting all of the amazing work our volunteers achieved this year, we always like to honor a handful of individuals who have gone above and beyond. The awards have changed to reflect what a different year we’ve had.

**TRAIL AMBASSADOR QUARANTEAM AWARD:**

*Kate Charles, Amy Yuter, and Greg Zarro*

COVID-19 hit right at the end of training for the new class of TAs, and we were not able to provide them with the usual mentors and in-park practicum training. That didn't stop this eager trio of volunteers who jumped right into the role of stewardship by providing outreach to park users and removing litter on their trail shifts.

**CREW LEADER QUARANTEAM AWARD:**

*Jim Dugan, Kristina Victoreen, and Dave Stehman*

As with our other quaranteam honorees, this trio of Crew Leaders jumped into action by performing park-wide assessments, corridor and sightline clearing, and co-leading our Volunteer Service Days. Many thanks to the tutelage of David Bower, who worked with them every Wednesday.

**THE LITTLE-BIT-OF-EVERYTHING AWARD:**

*Matthew Kokoszka*

Matthew is one of a handful of volunteers who wears both TA and Crew Leader hats. This year, he pulled extra duty in a variety of roles: taking TA outreach shifts, co-leading Volunteer Service Days, partaking in just about every Crew Leader activity, and swapping out the Love Letters to the Covered Bridge journals. He even provided music for the virtual Wissahickon Quizzo games we ran this year.

**VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR:**

*Kaitlyn Evans and Bill McGeeney*

Kaitlyn and Bill were strangers when they both went through Crew Leader training in 2019. A year later, not only are they a confirmed item, but they are equally instrumental in the stewardship of Wissahickon Valley Park. They’ve co-led trainings with the new class of Crew Leaders, organized independent small group projects, and have assisted in some way with just about everything we’ve done this year.
WHAT CAN I DO OUTDOORS THIS WINTER?

Are you one of the thousands of people who has rediscovered the great outdoors and the Wissahickon Valley since the pandemic began? With the cold weather approaching, you might wonder how you can possibly keep feeling that peace and energy that being outdoors has given you during the winter.

At the Tree House, our staff lives by the Scandinavian saying “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.” Meaning, if you are dressed appropriately for the weather, you can handle your time outdoors and even enjoy it. Remember when your mom bundled you up with the boots and the plastic bread bags around your feet to keep your socks dry? And you wore so many layers upon layers of sweaters that you could barely zip your coat? But you could stay outdoors for hours playing in the snow, couldn’t you? Kids are extremely resilient in what adults see as bad weather. It’s time to find your inner child and rediscover the fun that can be experienced in the cold weather.

This might be the year you invest in snowshoes or cross-country skis. On those magical days when we have a fresh snowfall, find your way to the Wissahickon. You probably won’t be able to drive up the Tree House driveway, but park along Northwestern Avenue and take a hike up the hill. Look for animal tracks in the snow, take in the beauty of the snow-covered branches, and enjoy the peace and quiet of sounds muffled by the snow. A hike to Andorra Meadow is a favorite of mine. You can even bring the kids and a sled and slide down the hill in back of the Tree House.

Even if we don’t get snow, there’s plenty to see in the winter. The views across the valley will be longer, and the evergreen trees will contrast with the grays and browns of the deciduous tree trunks. Look for the Christmas fern, one of the evergreen ferns, whose leaves look like a Christmas stocking. You may find bird nests from the past season, icicles along Forbidden Drive, or the fabulous rock outcroppings in the valley.

Before you head out, be prepared. Check the weather report and remember that the Wissahickon Valley is shadier and cooler than the surrounding neighborhoods. Trails can be icy, so wear boots with traction, or you might even want traction cleats that attach over your boots. Keep your feet dry and warm—cold toes can make life miserable. Whatever you do, embrace this time to slow down, discover the outdoors in a new season, and stay healthy.

Trish Fries is an Environmental Education Specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.
Here’s my schedule from Tuesday, February 18, 2020: meetings at 8:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 3:00, 5:00, and 6:00. No kidding.

This randomly picked day was not atypical. As the general manager of Weavers Way Co-op, some days my job seemed to be nothing more than a seemingly endless wave of meetings, almost never taking less than an hour, usually in the Co-op’s conference room with its mismatched chairs, wobbly tables, and cases of canned beans stacked along the walls. A less-inspiring space would be hard to find. Then along came COVID-19, and pretty much overnight, face-to-face meetings ceased.

Even pandemics have their upsides. Early on, some of the more “deranged” members of our team attempted to keep up the pace of our meetings by going virtual, but as online meetings proved universally unpopular, they tended to happen only when absolutely necessary. Now, I might have four or five a week. They are dreadful, but at least they are infrequent.

Actually, I’m still having face-to-face meetings, too, but usually with just one other person, a much more efficient use of each other’s time. Mindful of guidance from public health officials to avoid closed indoor spaces, for in-person meetings I’ve ditched the Co-op’s dreary conference room in favor of the trails of the Wissahickon. Since March, weather permitting, almost every face-to-face meeting I’ve had has been in the form of a walk-and-talk through the Wissahickon.

The results are salutary. Apart from the obvious benefits of fresh air and exercise, meetings conducted during walks in the Wissahickon have proven to be largely productive and efficient. Cell phones stay in pockets, and one cannot easily daydream like one can when sitting at a conference table.

Regardless of who I’m with, the pattern of these walk-and-talk meetings is almost always the same. One person takes the lead, the other trails behind 10 or 12 feet. Most of the conversation takes place without eye contact, but when someone wants to ensure they have the other’s attention, he or she stops, and for a moment or two the meeting is held facing each other, perhaps six feet apart, before walking resumes.

Occasionally an obstacle—a fallen tree or a particularly tricky length of trail—requires that the meeting topic be dropped as we navigate the challenging terrain. These brief interludes help reboot the conversation, allowing for stale threads to be dropped, to be replaced by something fresh.

My Wissahickon walk-and-talk meetings have been stimulating and fulfilling. They have become something to look forward to, not something to dread. These are trying times, but those of us predisposed to optimism reflexively seek the silver lining. For us, no matter how hard things get, the glass is half full. Plenty of others have written about how the pandemic has taught us to appreciate the things in life that truly matter. Friends, family, domestic tranquility, and whatnot. All true.

But let’s add to that list the value in all of us getting outside more and becoming reacquainted with the natural assets that make up our world. These last few months I’ve walked through parts of the park I haven’t been to in quite some time. I’ve found trails I’ve never walked along, which have taken me through the Cresheim Valley and around Blue Bell Hill. What an enchanting place our park is!

As we head into winter, my plan is to maintain my new routine: all face-to-face meetings in the Wissahickon. Dress for the weather. Walk briskly. I may never set foot in the Co-op’s conference room again.

Jon Roesser is the general manager of Weavers Way Co-op.
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!

**Birds of the Wissahickon**

- American Robin
- Mourning Dove
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Flicker
- Bluebird
- Nuthatch
- Blue Jay Red
- Cardinal
- Canada Goose
- Red Tailed Hawk
- Chickadee
- Screech Owl
- Coopers Hawk
- Sparrow
- Eastern
- Towhee Tree
- Swallow
- Goldfinch
- Turkey Vulture
- Grackle
- Warbler
- House Finch
- Woodduck
- Mallard Wren
- Mockingbird

**PINE CONE BIRD FEEDER**

*Courtesy of Wissahickon Environmental Center*

**You will need:**
- Pine Cones
- String or Wire
- Peanut Butter or Shortening
- Bird Seed (Small seeds are best)
- Table Covering
- Bowl
- Spoon or Knife

**Directions:**
1. Tie a string or wire around the top of a pine cone, adding a loop.
2. Spread shortening or peanut butter thoroughly on pine cone and in the cone scales.
3. Put cone in a bowl of bird seed, and roll until the seeds completely cover the cone.
4. Hang the pine cone outside where the birds can feast on it.

**Notes:**
- Birds will eat the seed mixture, but not the pine cones, so they can be reused.
- Peanut butter is nutritionally best, but shortening or lard are great substitutes.
- Caution: Squirrels have been known to steal the entire pine cone!
**PAPER BIRD ORNAMENT**
Cut, color, fold and assemble a Northern Cardinal

**FOX’S SCAVENGER HUNT**
Go for a hike this winter in Wissahickon Valley Park and help Fox find everything on his list.

- [ ] ICICLE
- [ ] FLYING BIRD
- [ ] CARDINAL
- [ ] FEATHER
- [ ] OAK LEAF
- [ ] BIRD NEST
- [ ] PINE CONE
- [ ] TWIG
- [ ] PINE NEEDLE
- [ ] ANIMAL TRACKS
- [ ] A BERRY
- [ ] CLOUD

**Directions:**
1. Print page on card stock
2. Cut out the wings, body and tail
3. Color both sides of your cutouts
4. Cut slits on each of the grey dotted lines
5. Fold the wings and tail in half
6. Assemble by matching the letters on the slits
7. Punch a hole over the grey circle on the body
8. Tie a loop through the hole with string or ribbon
Friends of the Wissahickon will host its annual Public Projects Meeting on January 27, 2021, to share progress on its major projects over the past year and discuss upcoming projects for the new year. Visit fow.org/events for more details about this virtual event.

**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.

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**CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT’S BEEN HAPPENING ON THE VIRTUAL VALLEY?**

We’ve put together a list of some of the highlights of FOW’s online programming for your enjoyment and education.

See more here! >>

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**BUILDING COMMUNITY TOGETHER**

At Univest, we firmly believe in giving back to the local communities we serve. For more than 140 years, it’s been our way of making a difference each day, through helping to improve the quality of life for our friends and neighbors. Because local values are as important to us as they are to you.

COMMITTED TO LOCAL

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**LET’S BE FRIENDS.**

BECOME A MEMBER >