“Duality of Reality Next to the Walnut Lane Bridge on Forbidden Drive” Photo by Mac Allen
First Place-Landscape
Biennial Wissahickon Photo Contest 2020
The coming of spring brings relief—from the cold of winter and threat of big storms to the longer light and promise of renewal and growth.

After last year’s pandemic-related delays, FOW is thrilled to be embarking on various stages of significant capital trail and habitat improvement projects. At our annual Public Projects Meeting (p. 4) in January (virtual for the first time) I reviewed plans for the Valley Green Run and Pedestrian Bridge Project as well as other projects, which are guided by our Strategic Blueprint, the Sustainable Trails Completion Plan and our Ecological Land Management (ELM) Plan as vital investments in the Wissahickon Valley Park.

Other much-needed work that’s moving ahead is Philadelphia Parks & Recreation’s closure of four bike trail bridges that require complete restoration and resurfacing after 40 years of heavy use to make them safer and more enjoyable. See the article on p. 18 for details on closures and detours during the construction, which is expected to last 9 to 12 months.

More than just birds, insects, and plants will be returning to the park this spring. Small groups of socially distanced volunteers have started the spring cleanup (p. 6). An expanded Seasonal Field Crew will be on hand to help with cleanups and visitor outreach about FOW’s mission and best park-use practices during the highest-use season. Their message to all visitors: with 1,800 acres, the Wissahickon Valley Park has plenty of room for everyone to have a great experience.

While there is much returning to the park, we are sorry to say goodbye to Trish Fries, who retires this May as environmental education specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center. She’s been a great friend to me, FOW, and the countless individuals who credit her for their love of the outdoors. We wish her well, as do others in a special tribute on p. 9.

FOW offers several ways to stay informed about conservation topics and Philadelphia’s green community from the experts. Register now for our virtual Spring Valley Talks (p. 6) and join me for my new monthly Creekside Chats with partners and friends (see registration details on p. 3).

Let’s continue to be great friends.

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director

With 1,800 acres, the Wissahickon Valley Park has plenty of room for everyone to have a great experience.
CREEKSID CHATS WITH RUFFIAN

FOW invites members to join our Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann for her new virtual Creekside Chats. Grab your lunch and join her at 12 p.m. on the last Wednesday of every month as she speaks with partners and friends in Philadelphia’s green community about new projects, programming, policy, and more. Join us for this monthly live-streamed event on Facebook and YouTube.

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.

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

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.

SAVE THE DATE

VIRTUAL ANNUAL FOW MEMBERS MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 1 • 6 PM

FOW members are invited to review the last year, elect members to the Board of Directors, and learn about upcoming projects at this annual event. Register at fow.org/events to receive a Zoom link to attend the meeting.

LET’S BE FRIENDS.

BECOME A MEMBER
ON THE TRAIL AGAIN

Three strategic improvement projects planned for 2020 had received grant funding, and bids were ready to go out for contract when the pandemic hit. But all of them will move forward in varying stages of implementation throughout 2021 and into 2022.

Lower Valley Green Run Restoration and Pedestrian Bridge

Years of worsening erosion at this site caused the natural trail to collapse and the ground under the wooden footbridge to give way, which finally necessitated the area’s closure to traffic. Now, FOW is investing more than a million in what are basically two simultaneous projects to stabilize the streambank and restore an essential trailhead link along Valley Green Road.

This complex project, on the scale of the Forbidden Drive Streambank Stabilization, will feature a new pedestrian bridge and boardwalk that will safely move visitor foot traffic off the road as people head down to this central area of the park. “The bridge element is a great way to create the Wissahickon experience for folks who don’t get out onto the upper trails system,” noted FOW Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann. And, as a significant addition to the park’s visual landscape, it will join the list of other favorite Wissahickon sites along the lines of the iconic Valley Green Inn, the Red Covered and Fingerspan Bridges, and other landmarks. Several design concepts and possible materials (e.g., a wood and concrete combination or all-steel) are being considered. In the future, FOW will announce ways that the community can contribute to the bridge and boardwalk project through fundraising and recognition opportunities.


BUILT FOR RESILIENCE

The “Monster”

The highlight of 2020 field projects was the completion of the Monster Trail Project, one of five trail projects identified in the completion plan for FOW’s multi-year Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI). Restoration included regrading, armorring, and deberming to repair existing drainage and prevent additional erosion. This was an excellent example of the decision-making matrix identified in FOW’s Ecological Land Management (ELM) plan in action. Rather than closing the trail and cutting a new one through high quality habitat, FOW applied its principles of park user engagement and stewardship by making the strategic decision to protect the trail’s habitat and its value as a good connector and favorite of park users who love the physical and technical challenge of its steep, rocky terrain.

Status: Completed in August 2020.

Quarry Loop

Volunteers are still completing work they began last year to reverse erosion at the southern end of the Quarry Loop on Lincoln Drive. The addition of foundations and drainage will realign the area, increasing sustainability, decreasing susceptibility to trash dumping, and making the trail more enjoyable for visitors. Trail improvement plans include adding a short loop that extends the trail from the bottom of the mountain bike skills area and expanding the skills line in the lower area of the quarry, which will have features for beginners and children.


PUBLIC PROJECTS MEETING 2021

FOW Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann began this year’s annual Public Projects meeting in January, held virtually for the first time, with a recap of significant work accomplished despite a year marked by COVID-19 restrictions, delays, and a preview of major capital investment projects that are back on track.
**Lavender Trail (Gully North)**

The work on this project will remediate one of two major erosion sites along this trail, specifically around the Chestnut Hill Avenue/Crefeld Street interchange, which has steadily grown over the last decade to become one of the largest sources of sediment discharge into the Wissahickon Creek. As with much of FOW’s restoration work, the goal is to capture or at least slow the flow of stormwater as it channels down to the creek. This will be accomplished by stabilizing sections of the 970-foot-long actively eroding gully, regrading the steep bank slopes, and planting native vegetation. Before construction begins, FOW will install soil moisture sensors in the gully to collect details of the erosion taking place in real time and during weather events.

**Status:** Pending contract. Scheduled for completion in 2022.

**Restroom Facilities Master Plan**

“When you spend a lot of time working in the park, you spend a lot of time talking about trash and toilets,” said Tittmann, referring to the Restroom Facilities Master Plan process, which resumes this year after pandemic-related delays. In partnership with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, through funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, FOW continues to evaluate current facilities and identify service gaps. Considerations in this complex process include questions such as: How many bathrooms should we have for a park of this size and with this known visitorship? Where should they be? What type, considering the constraints of the landscape?

In anticipation of the master planning process, online surveys were conducted with the help of graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania. User counts captured through trail counters positioned throughout the park will also inform the plan. FOW will offer more opportunities for public input in the fall.

**Status:** Under contract. Scheduled for completion at end of 2021.

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**Moving Forward in 2021**

In preparation for another year of high volume visitorship, FOW is excited to be welcoming back our valuable seasonal field crew with double the impact (six people instead of three) and for an expanded five months instead of three. The crew will be lending extra hands on cleanup and improvement projects, but their primary focus will be on supporting visitors, especially on the busiest weekends, whether it’s giving directions to additional parking places, locating the nearest bathroom, or reminding them about best COVID-19 safety practices.

It’s all to ensure that every visitor has a welcoming and enjoyable park experience. The seasonal crew will also help promote the principles of Leave No Trace (LNT), a partnership with the Center for Outdoor Ethics that was supposed to launch last year but was delayed due to the pandemic. This summer the Wissahickon Valley Park will officially become an LNT Hot Spot. The designation brings to the park grassroots education resources about sustainable practices, such as adopting a “carry in, carry out” philosophy.

Any discussion about past or future FOW projects and achievements must include our volunteers who play an integral role in the ongoing stewardship of the Wissahickon. Despite a year of restrictions, without scheduled volunteer days, FOW’s volunteer community still came together from a distance to get the job done in a big way through our Wissahero program. At the Public Meeting, Volunteer Manager Shawn Green saluted FOW’s volunteers for their hard work and love for the park. See the Volunteer Update on p. 6 for current volunteer opportunities.

Follow progress on FOW’s improvement projects and volunteer service opportunities in this newsletter at fow.org, or sign up for our weekly e-Newsletter at fow.org/contact-fow/, and follow us @FOWissahickon on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
**ONLINE SPRING VALLEY TALKS**

**Wednesdays • 6-7 p.m.**

Join FOW for informative presentations for members and the public on relevant topics of public land use, environmental advocacy, Pennsylvania wildlife, and more. Valley Talks are a great way to stay informed while supporting FOW’s mission “to conserve the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley and support public interest therein.” Feel free to invite a friend and get them involved, too! 

Register to attend a Valley Talk at [fow.org/events](http://fow.org/events). Registrants will receive a Zoom link for these free virtual lectures.

**April 14**  
*Philadelphia’s Urban Forestry Plan with Erica Smith Fichman*

Philadelphia’s forest canopy helps to absorb air pollution and fight climate change, but it has suffered significant tree losses in the past decade. Philadelphia’s Community Forestry Manager Erica Smith Fichman will be discussing the city’s new 10-year Urban Forestry Plan to increase tree cover, and the work of organizations like TreePhilly in creating community around our urban forest. 

Erica Smith Fichman joined Philadelphia Parks & Recreation in 2011 to develop an urban forestry outreach and education program. Working with the Urban Forestry staff, they launched the highly successful TreePhilly Program in 2012, which includes the Yard Tree Giveaway Program, as well as other programs to encourage street tree planting and volunteer tree plantings in parks and recreation centers. Erica has a BS in Biology from Haverford College and an MS in Environmental Horticulture from the University of California, Davis, and she is an ISA Certified Arborist. She also serves on the board of UC Green in West Philadelphia.

**May 12**  
*People, Parks, Planet: Getting into Green Advocacy*

From planting community gardens on vacant lots to crafting climate legislation, advocating for the environment and our communities has never been more important. During Love Your Park week, FOW will be joined by speakers from organizations making moves at the community, city, state, and regional levels for a conversation on creating changes through advocacy work and how you can get involved!

**SPRINGING BACK FROM COVID**

Planning and running volunteer activities in the winter is always a challenge, as so much of what we’re able to do is dependent on the weather. Fortunately, between cold snaps and snowstorms, we were able to accomplish quite a bit over the winter. 

Throughout our weekly small group volunteer service days, we kept busy by maintaining previous planting sites, cleaning out drains, and beautifying high-use areas in the park by cutting back invasive overgrowth and removing vines from trees. David Bower (2019 Volunteer of the Year) ran a number of service projects, which included reestablishing a historic garden path in the Thomas Mansion section of the park. David and fellow Crew Leader Brad Maule led back-to-back weekend cleanups along the Monoshone Creek, removing, with volunteers, a whopping 99 bags of litter and various car parts from the waterway. 

We had beautiful weather for our annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service. COVID-19 forced us to limit the number of volunteers FOW could accept, but we still accomplished a huge amount of work. Over 60 volunteers were split into three smaller groups and safely spread out to tackle an enormous cluster of invasive vines on the fence line and in the forest surrounding Clifford Park. In all, participants filled over 200 lawn bags with vines that had been swallowing up the trees.

The launch of the Wissaheroes program last year was an inspiring initiative that demonstrated how eager volunteers are to take care of the park on their own schedule. In January alone, 46 individuals took part in self-led cleanups, removing nearly 78 bags of litter from the park! Based on this success, FOW has expanded its Individual Stewardship opportunities this year: along with parkwide cleanups, individuals can help gather important data on flora and fauna in the Wissahickon by becoming a Habitat Monitor (p. 17), and they can help the forest by destroying spotted lanternflies and their eggs. These activities are easy ways to steward the park when your time allows. FOW provides instruction, safety tips, and how to report volunteer hours online.

For those who prefer a group activity, FOW’s regular Volunteer Service Days—with smaller groups and COVID-19 safety measures in place—continue on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Check out the events calendar to register for our upcoming service days. However you choose to volunteer, we welcome your help to make a positive difference in the park.

In a normal year, FOW recruits and trains new Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders over the winter, but because of COVID-19, we’re conducting a hybrid refresher training for the existing trained volunteers instead of bringing in anyone new. It’ll be an invigorating start to a successful year of stewardship in the Wissahickon.

After a year-long hiatus, we look forward to the return of FOW’s popular Trail Ambassador-guided walks sometime in 2021. They will be rolled out slowly with smaller capacities and additional COVID-19 safety measures in place. Read more about and register for this FOW tradition here.

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**SPRING SUPER SATURDAYS**

FOW is seeking small groups of volunteers to help beautify the park on the following annual, specially designated service days in April and May. Please check our events page for dates and details.

- Philly Spring Cleanup
- Earth Day Planting
- Annual Creek Cleanup
- Spring Love Your Park Cleanup
How did you decide to volunteer with FOW?
I was always curious about how trails were built. I’ve seen maintenance teams reconstructing trails in Utah and Washington, and I wanted to learn. I realized that I could give back to a place I’ve used many times over in many different capacities. The more I got to know the passionate FOW team and the more exposure I had to the eager FOW volunteers and the eclectic mix of crew leaders all tied together by their love of the park, the more assured I was that I chose a cause that would have immediate impact on people’s lives.

What do you love most about the Wissahickon?
Having grown up in Chestnut Hill, with easy access to the Wissahickon gorge, I took it for granted that every city had great parks. Upon returning to Philadelphia after 50 years away, I now know that this is not true; I now know that there is no portion of any city park in this country that compares with the Wissahickon for physical beauty, for geologic interest, for both pre- and postcolonial history. When I was nine years old my family took a trip to climb Mount Olympus in Washington State. For months before this trip, we all would put on our hiking boots and sand-filled backpacks and hike up and down the hills of the gorge to get into mountain hiking condition. In what other city park in the United States is this possible?

Why did you decide to volunteer with FOW?
My father was the president of FOW for many years. When I returned to Philadelphia, I felt there was no choice but to join right away.

How have you adjusted to volunteering in the time of COVID-19?
I have found working weekday “stewardship” shifts with Shawn Green, Dave Bower, and Varian Bosch to be the best part of my get-out-of-the-house time since March 2020.

What have you enjoyed most about volunteering?
Working with other Wissahickon lovers refuels my belief in the beauty of our valley and in the preservationist instinct that nourishes our community.
The first time I met Trish Fries, environmental education specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center, I was dressed in my farming finest, trampling through the snow to Maple Sugar Day on Forbidden Drive. I don’t know what was sweeter: Trish supporting me as a volunteer with little sugaring knowledge, or the syrup itself.

After leading the center for 18 years, Trish will retire this May. I have been privileged to work with and learn from her for 15 of those years. She set me on a path of practicing environmental education that led me to many great adventures—and then back to the Tree House—none of which could have been possible without her.

According to Trish, her time at the Tree House has been her “favorite job ever.” Trish began her work there in the framework laid forth by her predecessor Sioux Baldwin, but she quickly started creating her own legacy, applying her diverse education and experience as a landscape architect, environmental educator, and lifelong naturalist.

One of Trish’s most impactful programs was her development of the Tree House Adventure Camp and Out-n-About Camp. These highly sought-after activities have allowed children to connect with nature, and to explore and learn in their own way, while meeting new friends and making memories with old friends. Most of the kids who attended those camp are now adults, but they return to help out in the summers and even bring their own kids back to the Tree House. These are the moments that all educators hope to experience: seeing that their hard work, teaching, planning, and going above and beyond was all worth it.

We’ve had a lot of unexpected changes over the past year and a half, but Trish’s retirement was one change we could plan for, and we honor the education legacy she leaves for us to carry on. While my colleague Verland Wayns and I will work hard to adapt and keep education at the Tree House at the high standard Trish has set for us, we know that it will be a difficult transition. We know she will miss us, but we will take comfort knowing that it will be while she is on one of the many adventures she will soon take, or at her next, very important, full-time job as a grandmother.

I am not the only one who has fond memories of Trish as a friend, educator, caretaker of the Tree House, and steward of the Wissahickon. Below are just some of the tributes we’ve collected from the many people in whose lives Trish has made a difference.

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

She set me on a path of practicing environmental education that led me to many great adventures—and then back to the Tree House—none of which could have been possible without her.
Trish Fries demonstrates fabric dying with black walnuts at the Outdoor Adventure Club.
Photo credit: Christina Moresi

“Trish has always been so kind and lovely to my children! My five kids love nature and have participated in many WEC programs. Once my daughter left a piece of equipment at the Tree House, and Trish personally delivered it to our front porch! She is so genuine and authentically in love with our natural surroundings and the Wissahickon. She was also so very kind and gentle with children. Very calming.”
—Rita Hertzog

“I had an amazing experience working with Trish the summer I graduated from college. This was one of my first experiences working with kids as an educator. I am so thankful for the mentoring Trish gave me prior to becoming a Philadelphia School District science teacher. Her passion for nature was a key reason I brought several school groups to the Wissahickon (even though Cobbs Creek and Pennypack were closer). My children also got to know Trish through summer camp.”
—Jill Stevenson

“My two kids, who are now 28 and 20, were so fortunate to have Trish in their lives. Many of their childhood “firsts” happened through the Tree House and all the activities that Trish organized there for families with young children: nature walks, night hikes, fishing, scavenger hunts and geocaching, lessons on the water cycle and birding, gathering, preparing, and eating foods picked in the Wissahickon, sessions of weeklong day camp, and the rare but exciting overnight stays in the meadow. I can picture Trish’s smiling face and energetic presence at all of these events. I’m sure my kids believe that she lives in the Tree House. Trish, we wish you all the best in your next adventures and thank you for all the joy you have brought to our family!”
—Linda and Bruce Pollack-Johnson, and sons Ben and Jamie Polson

“I knew Trish long before I sent my kids to camp at the Tree House. She is such a wonderful, caring person. She always took the time to get to know their personalities and make them very comfortable at summer camp.”
—Ellen Glendinning

“Since our child accompanies us on four legs when we hike on the Wissahickon trails our memories of Trish are not of camp days, but of full moon hikes. We would always look forward to the full moon hikes with Trish weeks in advance. No matter what time of the year, we enjoyed her company and listening to the sounds of nature. Hanging with her afterwards by the firepit and toasting marshmallows was an added treat. We also loved seeing her out on Forbidden Drive teaching on Maple Sugar Day and other various special occasions. She always had fascinating things to learn for both kids and adults. She was a wonderful asset and will be greatly missed.”
—Mindy Cohan, Lauren Rosenberg, and “Jem”
“What stands out to me is seeing Trish interacting with kids. Whether watching her in person, or even looking at a photo, you can see how excited and engaged they are in learning when she’s around, even the littlest ones. That passion, knowledge, and enthusiasm will live on in their lives and in the conservation work Trish supported.”

—Ruffian Tittmann, FOW Executive Director

“Trish has enlivened the programming and sense of community at the WEC throughout her tenure. Her legacy of helping children and families connect with the wonders of nature will be her enduring gift to the Wissahichon.”

—Maura McCarthy, Former FOW Executive Director

“Working with Trish over the last decade has been such a joy, and we will miss her dearly! I’m so grateful to have had the privilege of being personally inspired by Trish’s easy presence and deep knowledge of the natural world. And what a gift to watch her encourage a sense of wonder in nature in both children and adults alike.”

—Sarah Marley, FOW Development Director

“It will be a bittersweet transition for FOW, WEC, and PPR as Trish leaves us her legacy of creative enthusiastic leadership in environmental education. We are all richer thanks to her decades of service to diverse communities throughout the Philadelphia region spanning many decades. Trish said yes to every idea I brought to her. She made herself available 24/7 to co-host or help guide crowds of 60 people and up to Andorra Meadow to look and listen for bats with our echolocation devices. Trish was always open to walks that supported NaturePHL, City Nature Challenge, and iNaturalist programming and missions. Favorite moments include Trish surprising us with her iconic Bat Night headdress, co-leading the Herp Walk for City Nature Challenge at the wetlands in the rain, and being out with me for many years taking down the Moth Night light lures, sheets, and gear by moonlight. So much of what Philly kids and families know and appreciate about the natural world comes straight from Trish. Her impact will live on, and we are grateful for her dedicated work and her service.”

—Kris Sofia, Trail Ambassador and PA Master Naturalist

“It has been a privilege to have Trish leading the Wissahickon Environmental Center. As a Trail Ambassador I have enjoyed her annual plant life tours, the annual maple sugaring events, creek explorations, programs on the animals in our beautiful forest, and much more. She has supported our TA geology tours, including housing our rock collection. Thank you, Trish, for giving so much to us.”

—Sarah West, Trail Ambassador

“I will always appreciate Trish’s plant identification walks, her friendly helpfulness, and overall wealth of knowledge.”

—Marv Schwartz, Trail Ambassador

“Thank you for bringing nature inside at the Tree House on all the walls. And for getting kids cooking mud pies outside in the little creek. Your NATURE inspirations for kids have been wonderful. All the best for your retirement with your family.”

—Bob Walls, Structures Crew Member, FOW Board Committee Member

“Trish inspired me to become a Trail Ambassador when I met her in 2017. I was impressed by her knowledge of the natural world and her commitment to conservation through teaching and learning. The Andorra Natural Area remains a place where respect for the homes and ecosystems of nonhuman animals is paramount, thanks to Trish’s 18 years of hard work. I’ll always remember Trish teaching us how to safely eat stinging nettles! I wish her the very best.”

—Irene Loboa, Trail Ambassador

“The Tree House and Trish Fries. It’s hard to think of one without the other. Although Trish will soon retire from directing educational programming at the Wissahickon Environmental Center (WEC), FOW will forever associate the two. The Tree House was where hundreds of children discovered nature, and others, including staff, found their life’s work in environmental education. Beyond the Wissahickon, her knowledge of the outdoors inspired students and environmental advocacy groups throughout Philadelphia.

Trish’s influence as a partner on the development and execution of FOW’s in-park stewardship over the years is evident everywhere at WEC: historic preservation of the environmental center, trail restoration, habitat reclamation, stormwater remediation, signage and wayfinding, improved accessibility, composting toilets—the list goes on.

In honor of Trish’s commitment to the Wissahickon and environmental education, please consider giving to FOW’s new Treehouse Fund to benefit ongoing programs at this special place.

Happy trails, Trish, from everyone at FOW. Below are just some of the sentiments from your many well-wishers.

“Having over 10 years of memories with Trish, Maple Sugar Day always comes to the forefront. Every year, Trish led a team of dozens to prepare, volunteer, and enjoy the smiling faces of so many children, adults, and quite a few dogs.

As a Trail Ambassador, it was always a treat for my hikers during my guided walks to visit the WEC and see that Trish was there. It was perfect timing for lots of questions about wildlife, the history of the Tree House, the big long black and white photograph of the workers at the Andorra Nursery, what bones were in the cabinet, and, of course, “Where’s Tommy?” (the resident Tree House cat). She taught us what plants we could brew tea with, make pesto with, relieve seven-minute itch with. Trish has touched so many lives, young and old, during her tenure at the WEC. I’m going to miss that smile and all of her stories! I hope that her retirement is rewarding and fun.”

—John Dixon, Structures Crew Member

“A few months after I started volunteering with FOW’s Structures Crew in April 2017, Verland asked me if I would come up to the Tree House to help him try to fix the shop’s table saw. He introduced me to Trish, who replied, “Welcome, JD, to the Tree House, have fun.” I’ve been there two days most weeks since, helping her and Verland around the property. I really will miss her and her stories about her grandkids and making maple syrup. I hope that her retirement is rewarding and fun.”

—Bob Wallis, Structures Crew Member, FOW Board Committee Member

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—Sarah West, Trail Ambassador

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—Irene Loboa, Trail Ambassador

Friends of the Wissahickon • Spring 2021
“Balance! Balance!” shouts my two-year-old daughter, Maggie, as she descends into Wissahickon Valley Park. As we have practiced, Maggie stops, bends her knees, and bounces up and down to maintain her balance. More than a year into a pandemic during which the Wissahickon has become a vital extension to our backyard, the balancing is more a game than a necessity. Maggie knows how to hike but likes to remind her dad that her fundamentals are sound.

For 10 years, I have lived in the neighborhoods of Roxborough, East Falls, and Mt. Airy that abut the park. But not until COVID-19 upended my family’s childcare plan did I fully appreciate the park. It also took until the pandemic for me to become a member of Friends of the Wissahickon; I can’t believe how much I missed.

Right before the world shut down, my wife, Hannah, and I received the good news that she was expecting our second daughter. Soon after, we watched in horror and fear like everyone else as we grappled with coronavirus. The science became clear about certain issues (masks are important!), but unclear about others. Namely, the virus’s impact on pregnant women and newborns was a blank spot for much of 2020. Hannah and I pulled Maggie out of school and isolated. Throughout the pregnancy, the data never crystalized. Until our daughter Clara was safely born in September (and, really, up until now), we minimized our risks the best we could. That meant we had a lot of time to kill with the increasingly rambunctious and social Maggie. The Wissahickon was our salvation.

We started off slow. In the beginning, we’d take a leisurely walk up the hill on Wayne Avenue into Carpenter’s Woods. Maggie would do the “Loop,” a circular, flat trail that culminated with snacks on a bench while she gabbed to any person who passed. “I’m Maggie. I’m two!” she’d exclaim to unsuspecting dog walkers.

By late spring, we became more ambitious and had explored pretty much all of Carpenter’s Woods. Maggie learned to balance as we descended the one large decline. She threw rocks in the water, crossed the bridge, and one day even saw a hummingbird (she was not as impressed as her dad). Finally, she outgrew the self-contained neighborhood park. She was ready for the real deal.

We started at Kitchen’s Lane. We’d watch the horses eat at Monastery Stables, climb atop abandoned bridges, and eventually trek down to Forbidden Drive. The trip down to the trail initially involved carrying a wigglng and screaming Maggie. Soon after, we put our balancing to work. Maggie paced herself down the gravel hill, and if I timed the snacks the right way, she could hike back up on the ride home.

Once we began getting to the Wissahickon Creek itself, there was no turning back. With our pocket map in hand, we began plotting our excursions throughout the summer, fall, and winter. Maggie had her favorites: she opened up a “pickle shop” at one of the bathrooms near the Mt. Airy Avenue Bridge, played crossing guard to a family of ducks near Valley Green, and loved reading the shared stories from fellow parkgoers in the book at the Red Covered Bridge.

The pandemic has been a challenging time for everyone; balancing work, life, and our children’s health has been an exhausting and unending battle as well as I can now. The Wissahickon has facilitated that connection, and I can already see Maggie paying it forward. One recent weekend, Hannah strapped Clara in for her first hike. Maggie joyously pointed out her favorite spots and offered some wise advice: “Balance. Balance, Clara!”

Sam Scavuzzo is a Weavers Way working member and a Shuttle newsletter contributor.

Weavers Way Co-op members earn working member credit by volunteering for POW.
William Rittenhouse purchased a 20-acre plot of land along Paper Mill Run (a tributary of the Wissahickon Creek) in 1690 and built the first paper mill in the new nation. For the next 40 years, the Rittenhouse family was the only papermaker in America, operating from a thriving industrial community known as Rittenhouse Town. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was populated by over 40 buildings, including several mills, homes, a school, firehouse, and a general store.

But in 1891, the Fairmount Park Commission acquired the site and tore down the mill and a number of other nearby buildings as part of a plan to eliminate sources of pollution that were making the Schuylkill River, the city’s source of drinking water, unsafe. For the next 100 years, the site was used for park housing and was even home to the captain of the Fairmount Park Guards. In 1980 the nonprofit organization Friends of Historic Rittenhouse Town (HRT) was founded to preserve, restore, and interpret the site’s history and reestablish the legacy of papermaking.

Although Rittenhouse Town is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1992, the story of its important legacy often gets missed or is deemed confusing, according to Amy Ricci, HRT’s executive director. “The site looks nothing now like it did when the Rittenhouse family occupied it,” said Ricci, referring to the six buildings that remain from the original compound. “People have a misunderstanding about which structures are still standing and what they are.”

But Ricci, who joined HRT in 2019, is working to change that. She hopes to capture the considerable traffic from park users passing through HRT on their way to the Wissahickon, as well as engage dedicated visitors, with educational programming that has relevance to people’s current lives and interests. For example, a Halloween event featured a special cook making fun foods, such as donuts and soft pretzels, and hot cider, using the striking sixteen-and-a-half-foot hearth that is the focal point of the original Bake House (ca. 1725) that once fed generations of the Rittenhouse family and mill workers.

In addition to tours of the Rittenhouse Homestead (1707) and the Enoch Rittenhouse Home (ca. 1845), sharing the legacy of papermaking is part of HRT’s bread and butter. When the pandemic hit, Ricci created a how-to papermaking video and offered loaner kits online. And she has conducted virtual workshops with students from Jefferson University-East Falls, which she hopes to do more of with other groups, but she notes that the outdoor aspect of HRT lends itself well to having people socially distanced on site for hands-on activities.

Breathing new life and purpose into historic buildings is a central theme of historic preservation, explains Ricci, who holds a master’s degree in the subject that she is putting into practice with the reproduction barn, which the Works Progress Administration rebuilt from the original in 1938.

Previously used primarily for storage, the building currently houses three tenants: Natural Creativity, a homeschooling group based in Germantown that uses HRT has a site for outdoor learning; Wissahickon Restoration Volunteers, who remove invasive plants in the park and elsewhere and replace them with native ones using only hand tools; and the Paper Trail Bike Café, which, although it opened last March at the start of the pandemic, is doing well with its window service set-up and full service bike shop.

Ricci works closely with FOW’s Volunteer Manager Shawn Green on ways for the two organizations to collaborate, including hosting events such as FOW’s 2019 Ice Cream Social or last fall’s Landscape Week and other cleanup events. HRT and FOW “share” volunteer David Bower and his cleanup crew, who alternate hours every week between HRT and Thomas Mansion.

“We couldn’t do what we do without our partners,” said Ricci. “From Rittenhouse Town’s rich history, we’ll be finding ways to create new experiences and memories together.”

Take a virtual tour of the old and new at Historic Rittenhouse Town on FOW’s Map App.
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 backward!

Insects & Spiders of the Wissahickon

- Black Carpenter Ant
- Blue Dasher
- Bumblebee
- Carolina Mantis
- Carpenter Bee
- Common Buckeye
- Cricket
- Fishing Spider
- Grasshopper
- Harvestman
- Jumping Spider
- Milkweed Bug
- Monarch
- Orbweaver
- Red Admiral
- Regal Moth
- Stream Bluet
- Sweat Bee
- Tiger Beetle
- Tiger Swallowtail
- Webworm Moth
- Winter Firefly
- Wolf Spider
- Yellow Garden Spider
- Yellow Jacket

Happy spring, bird watchers.
Happy spring, Yellow Warbler and Tree Swallow.

Trout Lily
**BUTTERFLY WINDOW/WALL ART**
Cut, fold, decorate, and arrange on a window or wall.

**Directions:**
1. Print page on card stock.
   (You can use white or colored paper.)
2. Cut out your butterflies along the black dotted lines.
3. Crease your wings by folding on the solid gray lines.
4. Decorate your butterflies or leave them as they are.
5. Attach a small amount of poster putty to the bodies of your butterflies.
6. Stick and arrange your butterflies on a window or wall.

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

- TROUT LILY
- PUDDLE
- SQUIRREL
- BRIDGE
- FIDDLEHEAD
- ROBIN
- VOLUNTEER
- TREE BLOSSOM
- PINE NEEDLE
- EARTHWORM
- DUCK
- SPIDERWEB
**THIS NEWS IS APPLICABLE TO YOU**

Have you ever been in the park and wondered, “What is that?” or “Where is that?” It’s easy to find out with FOW’s Map App. If you haven’t tried it yet, it’s easy to use, with these informative features all just a search away:

- Interactive map of Wissahickon Valley Park. (No need to be worried about forgetting your map and getting lost in the park, since your location is displayed as you travel on any given trail. This is only available on the iOS version.)
- Information on trails, park amenities, and points of interest (in both English and Spanish).
- Special self-guided walks and talks with FOW Trail Ambassadors and staff.

Before you head out to the Wissahickon, download the Map App on an iOS (Apple) or use your mobile phone to open the Web App on Apple and Android devices here.

**MEMBERSHIP CARDS HAVE GONE MOBILE**

FOW has also gone digital for new membership cards and renewals, too. Since January, all current and new members are receiving digital membership cards, which can be easily downloaded on your mobile phone’s wallet app. Compatible with Apple Pay and Google Pay, the cards include a list of member benefits and businesses with member discounts, useful park information, and links to the FOW Member Hub for special event tickets. When it is time to renew your membership, the card even sends a series of reminders. (Don’t worry, we will still have the traditional membership cards upon request.)

Any businesses interested in offering discounts to FOW members please contact Maeve Pollack, Development and Database Manager, at pollack@fow.org.

**JOIN LET’S GO OUTDOORS**

**UPCOMING FREE VIRTUAL AND/OR IN-PERSON PROGRAMS**

**Watershed Education Lessons**
These lessons are best for third graders and up. They can be presented virtually or safely distanced in person.

**General Watershed and Book-Based Lessons**
Table-top model shows how pollution enters our waterways.

**Drinking Water Treatment or Sewage Treatment**
Learn how water from our rivers is cleaned and made safe for drinking, and how dirty water is cleaned and sent back to the river.

**Storytimes**

**Water-Related Theme(s)**
Water-related stories for school children up to grade five.

**Little Friends of the Wissahickon**
For children in kindergarten through second grade. Participants receive a Certificate of Participation and a prize pack that includes of copy of the *Little Friends of the Wissahickon* board book.

**Outdoor Learning Opportunities**

**Learn with Let’s Go Outdoors Sessions**
Learn about trees, birds, geocaching, and more at local sites. **FREE through May.** Fees begin in June.

**Community Read Program (April)**
Awbury Arboretum and Wissahickon Valley Park. Participants receive FREE tickets to Longwood Gardens. Check here for program schedules.

**Longwood Gardens Community Read**

Ruby’s Birds (and bird-watching)
Saturday, April 3 • 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

New!

**Urban Environmental Education Ambassadors**
A new field trip and education program for underrepresented seventh and eleventh graders in the Philadelphia Public School District. Caregivers or parents of students interested in applying for this program should complete this **application.**

Visit letsgooutdoors.net
HABITAT MONITORING CONTINUES

Just in time for spring, FOW has revamped its volunteer habitat monitoring program, and we’d love your help in capturing the reawakening flora and fauna. Andorra and Houston Meadows are great areas to scout early insects and pollinators, flowering shrubs, and emerging grasses using iNaturalist. For birders, there’s the eBird app to identify early breeding birds. Take a look at the map to help guide your spring habitat monitoring and consult FOW’s new habitat monitoring page on our website for more details and instructions.

SPECIES SCAVENGER HUNT

What lives in Wissahickon Valley Park? Help us find out!

IF A TREE FALLS …
FOW CLEARS IT

By Varian Bosch, Field Assistant

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a number of large storms, tree crews from Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR) are shorthanded and busy clearing trees in other areas around the city. This has left a considerable gap in staff to clear trees from Wissahickon Valley Park trails. Fortunately, thanks to FOW’s partnership with PPR, Joe Caesar was assigned to help me clear trails.

Joe Caesar is the Crew Leader of PPR’s TreeKeepers, a workforce development tree maintenance group that prunes trees, removes invasive vines and plant overgrowth in natural areas, and helps to maintain city stormwater planters.

Once a week, or after a storm, Joe and I assess down trees blocking trails that have been reported by FOW Crew Leaders, Trail Ambassadors, and the public. We prioritize cleanups in areas with multiple fallen trees to cover the most ground with limited staff.

After determining which tools and how many crew members are needed, the trees are broken down. The cut logs and pieces are then used for trail work as erosion prevention features, including water bars, contour logs, reinforced banks along tributaries, as well as blocks to unofficial rogue trails.

If you see down trees or any other problems in the park, please text WISS to 267-966-2207.

Joe Caesar, Crew Leader of PPR’s TreeKeepers, clears a fallen tree across the Yellow Trail just north of Gorgas Lane.
On March 1, the Wissahickon Bike Trail from Forbidden Drive to Ridge Avenue closed to pedestrians as Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) began restoration on the four bike bridges along Lincoln Drive.

After over 40 years of heavy use, especially over the past year, the trail bridges are nearing the end of their lifespan. To ensure long-term safety and enjoyment, they will undergo a complete restoration and, for the first time, installation of anti-slip resurfacing. Construction on the $1.2 million investment in Philadelphia’s trail network, funded by PPR, is expected to last nine months to a year.

**DETOURS**

During construction, the bridges will be closed to the public. A suggested detour route is posted along the trail for recreational hikers, cyclists, and commuters. Access to the Ten Box parking lot at Forbidden Drive and Lincoln Drive will also be restricted.

**TRAIL DETOURS**

1. **An on-street detour connects park trailheads via city streets next to the park.**
   - **NORTHBOUND:** Connects Ridge Avenue and Wissahickon Avenue via:
     - Hermit Street
     - Houghton Street
     - Walnut Lane
   - **SOUTHBOUND:** Connects Wissahickon Avenue and Ridge Avenue via:
     - Walnut Lane
     - Houghton Street
     - Hermit Street

2. **An off-road detour using soft-surface trails in the park.**

   **On-trail detour:**
   - Uses rustic park trails (aka “Upper Trails”)
   - Note: Includes steep slopes and soft surfaces. Not recommended for road bikes or inexperienced cyclists.

PPR prioritizes the safety of trail users and thanks them for their patience while this important infrastructure project is completed.