

# DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION

## 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Director:	Laurie Beisecker
Assistant Director	Katie Tomek (started May 2019) Christian Williams (ended March 2019)
Naturalist/Education Program Coordinator	Troy Dunn
Assistant Naturalist	Gabriel Bosen (started September 2019) Evan Venskoske (ended July 2019)
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Park Staff	Alyssa Ingram Cassidy Wood Clara Borsilli Gianna DiGeronimo Hanna Ingram Devon Klein Johathan Lewandowski Michael Sporich

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## A. Community Special Events

### 1. Summer Concert Series

The Park and Recreation Board chose the concerts for the Friday Night Summer Concert Series again this year. Concerts were held on each Friday from June 14 – July 26 with various types of musical entertainers performed in Bicentennial Park. Each group performed from 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. Diverse styles of music were heard including, oldies, country, acoustic guitar and polka.

### 2. Independence Day Activities

The parade was again sponsored by a donation from the **Fairlawn Area Chamber of Commerce**. On Thursday, July 4, the Independence Day Parade marched down West Market Street from the St. Hilary parking lot to the old Telxon building parking lot (3320 West Market Street). We once again had volunteers from the Copley-Fairlawn Kiwanis serve as our line organizers. Once the parade passed them, the people could make their way to Bicentennial Park for the Fireworks Event, event, which is underwritten by the **Fairlawn Community Foundation**. Mick & Rick played in the gazebo for two hours while food trucks served the people attending the event. The Brass Band of the Western Reserve played next and kicked off the fireworks display. The Fairlawn City Women's Club also sold refreshments during the concerts and the Copley Fairlawn City Schools Transportation Department provided free shuttles for the people from Summit Mall to the park.

### 3. Children's Events

Our children's parties continue to be successful, hosting both Fairlawn residents and those from our neighboring communities.

*Colors Day, Carnival Day, Water Play Days and Ice Cream Day* were held during the summer park program and proved to be fun additions for our summer camp kids. The summer park staff ran the events and the children and parents would like to see many of these become annual events.

We combined an event this year at the Learning Resource Center, *Halloween Open House and Movie in the Park*. This event attracted a record number of people for the open house and many of them stayed for an outdoor showing of Hocus Pocus at Fort Island Park. We had a fire in the fire pit and made s'mores and marshmallows, and we popped popcorn and had Halloween candy for those in attendance.

*Gingerbread House Making* was brought back for the fifth year. Families made gingerbread houses from graham crackers held together with icing and a choice of toppings to decorate their houses. This year, the addition of gingerbread person cookies were a surprise and the children loved decorating them as much as eating them.

*Noon Year's Eve* was a new event this year. Held from 11:00 pm – 1:00 pm, this family friendly event had all the fun of a New Year's Eve party, just a bit earlier! Dewey's Pizza at Summit Mall donated pizza, there was a balloon drop, an origami expert, a photo booth, noise maker craft, our Naturalists brought ferrets and turtles for the children to play with, and we had a sparkling juice toast at noon.

We collected pajamas and books for the Eastern Ohio Chapter of the Pajama Program at both of our winter events. We were able to provide quite a lot of books for the families in need.

## **B. Recreation Activities**

### **1. Summer Park Program**

We again had great attendance at our daily park activities which include borrowing equipment (tennis racquets, balls, hula hoops, games, etc.), daily sports and games at the parks and participating in craft time with the staff. The special event days outlined in the Children's Events section were a success and will continue in the years to come.

### **2. Sports Programs**

**T-Ball:** Jump Start Sports provided children aged 3 and 4 the opportunity to learn the basics of T-ball on Tuesday evenings at Croghan Park. Each child has practices and games and comes away with an MLB hat, team shirt, and award.

**Hummingbird Soccer:** Jump Start Sports came to the parks to provide basic soccer instruction to children ages 3, 4 and 5. The camp meets on Saturday mornings for an eight week session. Each child comes away from the camp with knowledge of dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting and positioning as well as a t-shirt and trophy.

**Lacrosse:** Jump Start Sports lacrosse is an eight week camp designed to give elementary school age children a positive introduction to the sport of lacrosse. They met at Croghan Park on Tuesday evenings

**Challenger Soccer Camp:** For the second year, the #1 soccer camp in America and Canada offered two half day and one full day program at Croghan Park this year. We had a good turn out and plan to offer this camp again in the future.

**Tennis:** Towpath Tennis Center again provided two tennis sessions at both Croghan and Griffiths Parks. They offer classes to both children and adults.

### **3. Community Gardens**

This is the ninth year for the Community Gardens located at Fairlawn Park. Garden plots are available to both residents and non-residents of Fairlawn. We have increased the plots currently being utilized by gardeners to 56, many of which are now year-round gardens. They plant vegetables, berries, flowers, bulbs and herbs in both above ground boxes and in the soil.

The gardeners have created their own community, giving advice to each other and mentoring new gardeners. They welcome the public to come look at their gardens and ask questions.

### **4. Soccer Fields**

The soccer fields at Fairlawn park continue to have more requests than we can handle for the usage of the field space. We currently have 5 adult leagues and 4 elementary school leagues using the fields for both games and practices. Along with that, we have two high school teams and one church that utilize the fields in the summer time for one-week camps. This year, we moved the Hummingbird soccer for 3-4 year old children from Croghan Park to the fields in the

summer months so they have actual goals and field markings to teach the children that much more about the game.

There are two different lacrosse teams that have used the fields when the soccer teams are not. They have continued to work together to make the fields work for both sports.

## **C. LRC/Naturalist Programs**

### **Naturalist Programs**

During the 2019 calendar year the Naturalist and Assistant Naturalist have been committed to growing the programs and attendance at the Learning Resource Center and Fort Island/Griffiths Park through nature, wildlife, environmental and natural resource education programs for children and adults of all ages. We met this goal by offering a broad spectrum of programs appealing to the widest audience possible as well as creating new and lasting partnerships. The Naturalist also traveled to several local institutions to present nature-based education programs as well as hosting many groups, schools, scout troops, and visitors through events at Fort Island Park. Of the variety of programs offered some were pre-paid registrations, non-paid registrations, free classes, and impromptu classes announced through social media and on-site announcements. Some programs were a one-time event while others were on-going or included multiple sessions. We also hosted holiday open houses throughout the year. Some events were planned and held in collaboration with other organizations, Naturalists, or nature centers. We have grown our programs, camps, and Archery sessions to the point that registrations were full most of the summer and additional names had to be placed on waiting lists. The Naturalist has also grown the Yoga class held on Wednesdays at the Fairlawn Kiwanis Community Center. In August the Naturalist obtained his RYT-200 certification as a Yoga Instructor.

We have had an increasingly positive response to our use of social media by posting our programs and events, by engaging the community more with various posts about wildlife, guessing tracks in the snow, showing flora and fauna from the parks, posting multiple-choice questions or games all for the purpose of engaging our followers outside of our programs or their visits.

2019 Programs: We offered a total of 176 individual classes or programs during the 2019 calendar year. The number of program participants reached 1,567 this year, which is about 11% of our annual visitors for the year. The annual visitor count for this calendar year totaled 14,376, which we can proudly say is our highest annual count to date.

A new Assistant Naturalist was hired in September after the previous Assistant resigned in July. The New Assistant Naturalist, Gabriel Bosen, has a BS degree in Natural Resources from the University of Vermont. He brings a lot of outdoors experience to the position and is especially adept at wilderness survival and tracking.

The Learning Resource Center received two designations in 2019 in recognition of our efforts in nature education and wildlife conservation. First, the pollinator garden by the LRC was designated as a Monarch Waystation by the Monarch Biological Survey at the University of Kansas for our efforts in Monarch and other pollinator conservation. It has really filled in with many native flowering plants in the past three years and we have received a lot of good feedback about it from the public. Second, we were designated a Wild School Site by the Ohio Division of

Wildlife for our efforts in nature education for the public. We are very proud of these achievements.

Some of the bluebird boxes and bat boxes that were deteriorated were replaced with new ones throughout the park. Nesting of bluebirds continues to be monitored. A new set of bat boxes will need to be erected to replace the old set that collapsed near the second bridge. Bluebirds have been returning to the park the last several years. This is a testament to the success of building and placing new bluebird boxes throughout the park. The LRC's insect specimen collection and botanical specimen collection continue to grow as new specimens are added each season. We have also begun to create a seed bank collecting seeds from native plants in the parks for an archived dry storage collection.

The City and Parks Department have been developing Fairlawn Park on Ridgewood road by adding a paved walkway around the oxbow and building an overlook on its edge. The Naturalists have been monitoring the site and documenting the flora and fauna found there. I am glad to report that not only are there several species of native plants growing there, but much wildlife is coming into the area as well. We are keeping a record to document and track species. We plan to begin presenting programs there in the coming year.

The LRC continues to keep current three permits: USDA animal welfare and education permit, Division of Wildlife collection permit, and the US Fish and Wildlife salvage permit.

For the purposes of professional development and to keep current with what is happening in the science field the Naturalist and/or Assistant Naturalist attended the following professional development conferences:

- Ohio Woodland Steward's Woodland, Water and Wildlife Conference
- Wildlife Diversity Conference
- Botanical Symposium
- EnviroScience Seminar

We participated once again in this year's Akron chapter of Audubon Society's annual Christmas bird count held on the second weekend of the month. This year we counted 36 different species of birds and a total of 486 individual birds at Fort Island Park and surrounding neighborhood. Our numbers will be added to the national count as part of the greater effort by the National Audubon Society of tracking bird populations throughout North America.

During the course of the year we had injured or orphaned wildlife brought in to us for assessment and we also received calls to check on possibly injured wildlife in and around the Fairlawn community. When possible, we released the wildlife after a short recuperation period. Other wildlife with more serious issues were transferred to an appropriate Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (i.e. for birds/raptors, mammals, etc.).

The Naturalists are also currently working with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Ohio Division of Wildlife to study the massive die-off of Star-nosed Moles and Short-tailed Shrews in and around Fort Island Park. Study and results are pending further investigation.

In 2019 we had on average about 20-25 regular volunteers attending weekly with some seasonal volunteers that only helped out in 2 or 3 of the summer months. Accumulated volunteer hours across the board in 2019 totaled over 100 hours.

The program animals housed at the LRC in 2018 include 2 Pigeons, Jenday Conure, 3 Parakeets, Cockatiel, 4 Eastern Box Turtles, 2 Ferrets, Chinchilla, 2 Holland Lop-eared Rabbits, Chilean Rose-haired Tarantula, 2 Garter Snakes, Brown Snake, Louisiana Milk Snake, Northern Water Snake, Green Anole, Veiled Chameleon, North American Toad, Bearded Dragon, Common Musk Turtle, Painted Turtle, 4 Red-eared Sliders, Crayfish, various Koi and other Fish.

Animal losses through natural death in 2019: Great Plains Rat Snake, Mexican Milk Snake, California King Snake, Gray Tree Frog, Wood Frog, Fire-bellied Toad, 2 Geckos, Veiled Chameleon (small), Red-eared Slider, Eastern Chipmunk.

Animals acquired in 2019: Veiled Chameleon (large), Green Anole

Taxidermy acquired: Turkey, 2 Pheasants

Specimens collected for future taxidermy: Common Yellowthroat Warbler, Barred Owl, Northern Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, Chimney Swift (fledgling), Gray and Black Pigeon, Short-tailed Shrew, Star-nosed Mole.

## **D. Fairlawn-Kiwanis Community Center**

Ongoing rentals and Civic Group meetings:

- Every Monday, the lower level is rented for a Tai Chi class.
- Fairlawn City Women's Club holds their general meeting on the first Friday of each month and their Board meetings on the third Friday of each month
- Fairlawn City Garden Club holds their meetings on the second Friday of each month
- VFW post #349 holds their meetings on the third Thursday of each month
- World War II/Korean and Vietnam Wars Roundtable holds their meetings on the fourth Wednesday of each month
- Fairlawn Toastmasters holds their meetings on the first, third and fifth Tuesdays of each month
- WWII/Korean War Roundtable hosts their speakers on the fourth Thursday of each month.
- Fairlawn Seniors hold their events on the first Monday of each month.
- Epilepsy Support Group meets on the third Wednesday of each month.

## **E. Staff Training**

**Laurie:**

**OPRA Conference – February 3-6, 2019**

**Women in Leadership – April 3, 2019**

**NRPA Conference - September 23-27, 2019**

**Eastside Roundtables**

- **February 13, May 1, September 4 and December 4, 2019**

**Troy**

**Wildlife Diversity Conference (Stayin' Alive) – Columbus, Ohio, March 5, 2019**

**Ohio Woodland, Water, & Wildlife Conference (Wildlife Track) – Mansfield, Ohio, March 6, 2019**

**Botanical Symposium – Columbus, Ohio, March 29, 2019**

**EnviroScience Seminar – Stow, Ohio, November 7, 2019**