

GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

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NATIVE PLANT FESTIVAL RETURNS

Celebrate the season by welcoming wildlife into your outdoor space with beautiful, beneficial native plants! Join Summit Metro Parks staff and local native plant nurseries on Saturday, May 18 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Munroe Falls Metro Park (521 S. River Rd, Munroe Falls) to learn about the vital role of native plants in our ecosystem, browse a wide variety of plants available for purchase and more!

Look for more information visit bit.ly/wildbackyards for event details.

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

POPULATE YOUR POND BY PLANTING NATIVE

By Jason George, Interpretive Naturalist

Arching gently skyward, a slender stalk emerges from a still pond. Broadleaf arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*) is the pinnacle of elegance with whorls of white petals gently pleated like fine fabric. More than a beautiful sight, this aquatic plant provides a bounty of pollen and nectar for butterflies, bees and skippers.

While colorful pollinators visit on the petals, katydids hop between broad leaves in search of a suitable home for their eggs. Muskrats and mallards forage for roots and seeds, parting the leaves as they swim by. The gifts of the arrowhead reach even deeper. The submerged stalks play host to the larvae of caddisflies safe in their armored homes woven from silk and pebbles.

Planting broadleaf arrowhead, or other native aquatic plants like spatterdock (*Nuphar advena*) and American

lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*), in ponds and ditches is an invitation to transform still waters into a rich home for a diverse array of creatures.

[Broadleaf arrowhead is sometimes called duck potato because its tuberous roots can be prepared and eaten just like potatoes. However, ducks are more likely to eat other parts of the plant due to having difficulty dislodging the roots from the soil.]

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SECRETS OF THE FOREST

By Marlo Perdicas, Biologist

A walk in the forest can enlighten all of our senses. Did you know that trees have senses, too? Through much research, we know trees are social, cooperative and even intelligent.

In recent years, scientists have made interesting discoveries about trees. We are familiar with photosynthesis, whereby trees convert sunlight to energy in the form of sugar. As it turns out, they not only use this sugar for themselves, but they share it to help other trees or use it as payment for services rendered.

Scientists learned trees prefer to live in communities. Forest trees benefit from the establishment of a local micro-climate, protection from wind and weather and the ability to share resources. Forester Peter Wohlleben discovered that trees provide nutrients to neighboring trees when they are sick. Trees also provide nutrients to their offspring and can distinguish their young from other trees nearby. While in the understory, younger trees have less sunlight for photosynthesis. During this time, mother trees will provide nourishment through their roots for their young trees to survive.

Trees also communicate threats to other trees in the forest. Just like we may wear perfumes to communicate with other people, trees can send signals to other trees by releasing chemicals. Trees can use these chemicals to warn other trees or to attract beneficial insects for themselves. For example, willows, poplars and sugar maples have been found to emit bug-repellent chemicals when a nearby tree is being eaten by insects. How do they know? The affected tree sends out warning signals to alert them! But repellent isn't always the solution. When pine trees are being eaten by caterpillars, they release airborne chemicals that attract predatory wasps. The wasps eliminate the caterpillars without harming the tree. Both the wasps and the pine trees win.

Arguably one of the most fascinating discoveries is that fungi provide a pathway for much of the communication between trees with mycelia. Mycelia is an underground network of root-like structures that act like an internet highway, connecting trees to one another and allowing nutrients and knowledge to be shared.

Trees use these pathways to feed their offspring, help sick trees or warn others that they are being eaten by pests. However, these connections come at a price. The fungi expect sugar produced by the tree in return for their services to fuel their growth. Unlike trees, fungi rely on external nutrients for energy. In a balanced ecosystem, this doesn't hurt the tree and everyone in the cycle of life benefits.

But, just like the internet, the under-ground web also has a dark side. Walnut trees can use these pathways to release toxins to sabotage neighboring trees, providing more resources for the walnut trees to thrive. Some orchids tap into the system to procure resources for themselves, sharing nothing in return.

Once met with skepticism, the notion of tree communication has been suggested for decades. Scientists' recent acknowledgment of observations that trees can converse, adeptly respond to threats and care for their offspring challenges the conventional

understanding of trees. Amazingly complex, nature has its own language — one that beckons those willing to watch and listen, inviting us to uncover the wonders concealed within the whispers of the trees.

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TREES TO TREASURES

By Lindsay Smith, Chief of Marketing & Communications

If you're one of the hundreds of thousands of people who have enjoyed a stop inside the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center or attended a private event at a lodge nestled within our scenic Metro Parks, you may have noticed beautiful and unique furniture and amenities made in-house from wood.

Your park district is fueled by professionals from many backgrounds, with many talents — most of which serve the public each day in less publicly visible ways than Park Carpenter Tony Morgan. Using special equipment and sustainable materials, Morgan creates the signs you see when you enter and navigate Summit Metro Parks — our portal entry signs, trail markers and more. He is also a talented woodworker and furniture craftsman. Over the years as park carpenter, Morgan has lent his talents to several special projects that enhance our visitors' experience and create exceptional quality items that will be enjoyed by generations to come.

When asked about his favorite project over the years, Morgan reflected: "There are so many projects I've been a part of here; I'm very proud of all of them. A few at the top of my list are the conference room table at [headquarters] and the wall cabinet for the executive director's office."

Tony Morgan joined Summit Metro Parks in 2003 as a park technician I. Since then, he's held several positions

in the operations department until 2016 when he was hired into his current role. He's been working with wood for nearly 16 years, setting up his own shop after renewed motivation from personal memories and admiration for the quality craftsmanship of Amish-made furniture.

For others aspiring to take the next step in transforming trees to treasures, Morgan shared this advice: "First and foremost, don't ever be afraid to challenge yourself. Find inspiration in whoever and whatever it might be. If you find satisfaction (mentally or physically) in creating things, wood is a beautiful way to display it."

From custom tables to unique displays, chances are you have seen one of Morgan's pieces around the Metro Parks. Reflecting on his work, Morgan added: "I think inside every one of us, we want to leave some mark on the world, whether it's with family or by inspiring people. For me, a part of my mark is dedicated to Summit Metro Parks. I hope the pieces that I built here will stand the test of time and will be remembered."

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Behind the Barricades

THE LATEST EFFORTS TO "FREE THE FALLS"

By Mike Johnson, Chief of Conservation

Visitors to Cascade Valley Metro Park will notice the Peck Road entrance, which leads to the renowned Signal Tree, is closed. This closure will continue for the next few years to accommodate two major water quality improvement projects: the Northside Interceptor Tunnel (NSIT) and Gorge Dam removal, also known as the initiative to "Free the Falls." The NSIT project is a City of Akron initiative and is part of its ongoing efforts to improve Cuyahoga River water quality and prevent

untreated sewage from entering the water. The Gorge Dam removal project includes preparing the sediment placement area, removing and disposing of contaminated sediment, and deconstructing the dam.

As planning for the NSIT and Free the Falls projects has materialized into tangible progress, the landscape in Cascade Valley Metro Park has transitioned into a construction zone. While park visitors anxiously await the thrill of a free flowing river through Gorge Metro Park's geological splendor, environmentalists anticipate vast improvement to the physical, biological and chemical integrity of the Cuyahoga, the construction vehicles that will make it all possible are rumbling through the park.

While the NSIT project construction continues, an even bigger water quality improvement project is just beginning. After years of intensive planning and collaborative efforts to remove the Gorge Dam, the U.S. EPA secured funding to implement the sediment management portion of the project. Summit Metro Parks prepared the sediment placement site by clearing a 40-acre area adjacent to Peck Road. The City of Akron will structure this site so it can receive the sediment. Once site preparations are complete and the contractor's schedule is accepted, sediment from the dam pool will be pumped to this location, stabilized, capped with native soil and reforested.

Closure of affected park areas ensures public safety and site security during these multi-year infrastructure initiatives. Upon completion, the region will have a renewed park and river to explore. Summit Metro Parks will be planning for this exciting future with public input. Please visit bit.ly/freethefalls for the latest project information.

[The Signal Tree will be protected during this process and will remain in place post-construction.]