



Foundation for Dane County Parks
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New Staff
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**Foundation
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**SUMMER
2020**

Community Reaps the Benefits of Our Parks

Now more than ever, our community is reaping the benefits of years of public and private support of our county and local park systems -- with over 15,000 acres of land and over 100 miles of trails. Dane County Parks have become even more essential than ever and access to our parks is free. The number of visitors in our county parks has increased by an estimated 40%, providing immeasurable benefits to the individuals, families, and the community. Good health and access to nature and the outdoors is always manifest, but in these challenging times it is critical for mental and physical health.

What do Parks Mean to You?

We are collecting photos and stories about how Dane County Parks play a role in community member well-being. These stories will help support and protect the parks for years to come!

Thank you, Jody Weyers, for sharing this story with us: "Nature has been my salvation for my body, mind, and soul. I have discovered incredible parks, hiking trails, lakes, and wildlife all within 30 minutes of my home. Most weekends, I would Google 'Dane County Parks' and then randomly pick a new place to explore. Being in the parks also gives me a sense of closeness to our participants at Operation Fresh Start. To know the trail I am on, the boardwalk I am walking over, the beautiful flowers in bloom were created by the hands of our young people. I have a new appreciation of our parks and all the staff, volunteers and our crews, who keep them looking beautiful for the public to enjoy! Being in nature has helped me appreciate this slower pace we are in. Since my social butterfly wings have been clipped, I am finding comfort in the quiet."

To share your photos and stories, please send them to: foundationfordanecountyparks@gmail.com. By submitting the photo(s) and story, you give the Foundation for Dane County Parks permission to use them for their communications efforts. Please include the park location and your name (requests for anonymity must be clearly stated).



Shelley Nelson finds peace at McCarthy Youth and Conservation Park.

We Appreciate Your Support

We are grateful for your support to the Foundation, especially because we have never had a time when parks are more important to the community. Unfortunately, it is also occurring at a time when many are feeling financial pain and economic insecurity. Please continue to enjoy the parks and their health benefits, but we just want you to know that every gift to our Foundation will support the parks now and in the future. Any gift is appreciated.

Thank you,
The Foundation for Dane County Parks Board of Directors

Foundation Grant Deadline and Recap

Second Round of Grants Due October 31st

Last year at this time, we were announcing the 11 recipients of grant funding from the Foundation for Dane County Parks totaling \$17,284. Like most things in life, COVID-19 has delayed many of these grant funded projects; yet much was still accomplished by leveraging the resources and commitments of our critical volunteer nonprofit groups. With a revised timeline and grant guidelines, the Foundation is moving forward with another round of grants with an application deadline of October 31, 2020.

Grants will fund 2021 volunteer nonprofit projects that support education, interpretation, and volunteerism within the Dane County Parks system. Grants will range from \$500 - \$2,000, and only one application per grant cycle is permitted. Grant recipients in the first round must submit a final report (one page, less than 500 words) or an interim progress report (followed by a final report once the project is complete) before consideration for this round of grants. The report shall summarize results/outcomes and how the Foundation was recognized as a funder/partner on the project.



The Foundation for Dane County Parks presented Friends of Festge Park with a check for the 2019 Friends of Dane County Parks Endowment grant during the 2020 Volunteer Summit. From left: Caryl Terrell (FDCP) with Jeanette Hoard and Gary Nelson (Friends of Festge).

Grant funds come from the Friends of the Dane County Parks Endowment managed by the Madison Community Foundation, Dane County Parks, and the Foundation for Dane County Parks. The fund is permanent, and the interest from the fund is used annually to support education, interpretation, and volunteerism within the Dane County Parks system. Volunteer groups interested in applying for funding can contact the Allocations Committee Chair Andy Lewis for the grant guidelines/application (ablewis7@gmail.com). As the Foundation continues to grow the Endowment fund in these tough times, there will be an increased ability to support the many volunteer and nonprofit organizations supporting our county parks.

Friends of Stewart Park Grant Project

Last year, the Friends of Stewart Park (FSP) received funding to expand educational outreach, interpretive signage, and the creation of a brochure for visitors. While COVID-19 interfered with several of their events, great progress was made on the new brochure and map of the park. The brochure will be made available at the kiosk in the main parking lot and entrance to the park. It will also be available via QR codes for park user cell phones, and posted on the FSP website.

The Endowment funded maps will assist visitors from outside the local area with becoming knowledgeable and comfortable with areas other than the Stewart Lake beach. FSP anticipates more people walking the trails to reach their interpretative sites and new signage (being planned with the UW Extension/Dane Environmental Council), to enhance their goal of improving and increasing their environmental education mission. FSP also increased its visibility through social media pages. These grant funded sites include Facebook (1,500+ viewers/500+ "nature notes"), a website (with professional bird and plant phenology listings, geology, a vegetation map, trail maps, and park history), email list (about 400 individuals), and Instagram.



The Friends of Stewart Park's 2019 grant focused on park outreach, visibility, and enhanced community development. Board member Carolyn White holds a newly designed brochure and trail map, one of the grant outreach components, submitted to DCP for their approval.

Staff Announcement

After successfully operating for nearly seven years as a fully volunteer organization, the Foundation for Dane County Parks is now moving ahead to hire two part-time staff positions. Funded by the two capacity grants we received from the Madison Community Foundation and Schlecht Family Foundation, these two amazing professionals will allow us to grow to provide the next level of support to the parks. We are ecstatic to have them join our team this summer!



Elisa Guerrero (guerrero.elisa@countyofdane.com) will serve as the part-time Foundation Coordinator. She is the Urban Planning and Sustainability Intern for the City of Monona and previously interned with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of Sustainability. Fluent in Spanish, Elisa currently provides staff services and support to Monona Committees including the City Plan Commission. "I am excited about the Foundation Coordinator position because of my interest in environmental resources, and because I have always loved spending time in the county parks around Madison, especially the bike trails! I'm looking forward to working with the Foundation to expand access to our parks and make them a more inclusive space for all," Elisa said.

Jessica (Jess) Hankey (jhankeyfdcp@gmail.com) will serve as the part-time Fundraising Coordinator, helping us coordinate and staff our Fundraising and Development Committees and write selected grants. Previously, she has served as the Early Literacy Project Coordinator with the Madison Public Library and supported strategic partnerships at the Madison Metropolitan School District on the City of Madison District Coordinating Committee, which required her verbal and written communication and grant writing skills. "I'm honored to join an amazing team of people who share my appreciation for the natural history of this region and commitment to ensuring that everyone in our community has access to and feels welcome in Dane County Parks," Jess said.



Thank You for Memorial Gifts

During the past few months, the Foundation has been named as the recipient of Memorial donations totaling over \$12,500 from seven families. Pursuant to the donors' wishes, most of the funds will go directly to help the Endowment grow as it now exceeds over \$600,000.

The memorials were for Michael Degnan, Dan Wisniewski, Jim Hughes, Craig Monroe, Guerdon Coombs, Jeff Ballweg, and Ronald Scheele. We are deeply sorry for their loss, but we are honored that those families trusted us and our work supporting the parks to allow us to be the vehicle to honor their loved ones.

These donations will help build our endowment and support the Foundation as we provide a self-sustaining permanent source of funds supporting Dane County Parks. Thank you to those families.

Endowment

\$1,000,000

\$900,000

\$800,000

\$700,000

\$600,000

\$500,000

\$400,000

\$300,000

\$200,000

\$100,000

Foundation Supporter Spotlight:

The Erdmans

By: Samantha Haas

While other kids who grew up in Madison often frequented local parks, Dan Erdman spent his childhood summers helping on the land his family purchased on the west side of Dane County instead. Decades later, he has found a new appreciation for the hard work, time, and resources that staff, volunteers, and supporters invest into an expansive park system like ours.

"Now as an adult, Natalie and I have been able to explore all the different recreational parks, wildlife areas, and trail systems that Dane County has established. It's been a new discovery for us," he said.

Even before Natalie retired, she and Dan would take off late Friday afternoons to pick a park within a short drive, go for a hike, and later find a new place to try a fish fry. One of their recent park discoveries happened by chance when they attended a memorial service at a cozy 1850s log church near Mount Horeb overlooking the Driftless Area. They returned a few weeks later to hike the mowed trails and view the prairie being restored around the church at the Hauge Historic District Park in the Town of Pery, with one of the best views of a sunset in Southern Wisconsin.

"There are so many options and parks to explore," Dan said. "We could go another 20 years and always go to a new place (park or trail system). It's a really amazing community asset that we have."

The closest Dane County Park to their home and Dan's workplace is Pheasant Branch Conservancy in Middleton, where Natalie enjoys the natural beauty and wildlife on weekly walks to the top of Frederick's Hill -- a place that holds a lot of meaning for them.

"I met Dan 15 years ago, and one of our first outings together was to Pheasant Branch to go canoeing and hike out there with Dan's dog," Natalie said. "Frederick's Hill was filled with invasives; you couldn't tell an oak savanna was there."

The hill -- like many other areas within our parks -- has been transformed over the years. "Dane County Parks and the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy have turned it back into the oak savanna it used to be. We visit various times of year and see the wildflowers that come and go. It's really a testimony, not to just owning land and having it open to people, but to the parks staff and volunteers taking it to where it needs to be," Natalie said.





"And, of course, we're very excited when Dane County purchased the property to the north," Dan said. "What's so great about many of these parks is they are supported by friends organizations that help with park upkeep and maintenance and mowing trails. It's a wonderful thing when you can get local people to take ownership."

That's just one of the reasons why the Erdmans have chosen to support our county parks. They were introduced to the Foundation through the nonprofit's co-founder Bill Lunney, who Dan said "has been amazing in his efforts to really develop and expand the Dane County Parks system."

As supporters of Groundswell Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy, too, the Erdmans are impressed with the collaborative approach the Foundation, Dane County, and other partners also take to preserve key parcels.

"I'm not sure if people in this community understand how impressive it is that their county government makes this kind of investment and partners so well with organizations who are trying to improve the quality of our land and water," Natalie said.

"As Dane County grows and there's more and more pressure to develop, these parks will become more and more valuable," Dan added.

The Erdmans can attest to the increased park use that Dane County has seen since the COVID-19 pandemic started in March. Instead of going to ball games and concerts, Dan said, people are getting outside and exploring parks.

"I think one of the few lasting benefits of this pandemic is people are discovering the outdoors, the beauty and value of nature, and how fun it is to appreciate the natural world," Dan said. "And that will pay dividends as people will value and try to stand up to protect these natural areas, which is critical."

Update From Parks Director Darren Marsh



Dane County Parks has been extremely busy. Park users have been using the parks and trails at historic levels. We're doing everything we can to continue to provide good access to all of our facilities. Our parks operations staff has been amazing. They've been working diligently to make sure the public can safely and efficiently use park facilities.

Restrooms and campgrounds were opened as a priority with safety precautions in place. Park permit sales and reservations were moved to an all online system. A few credit card kiosks are being added to high use parks as another option for patrons to conveniently secure a permit.

In the midst of this, park planners are working on the Lussier Family Heritage Center and the Lunney Lake Farm Park campground to convert to all solar to cover the electricity use for those areas. In addition, the county will offer car charging stations and a site for electric bikes to recharge batteries. The 40-acre dog park at Anderson Farm County Park in Oregon is underway. The area has already been planted to prairie and turf grass areas, and now staff are adding parking lots, storm water retention with rain gardens, and a trail system. The Division is also continuing the joint effort to provide accessible piers through the park system. Two new lake access piers were added to Babcock County Park this spring, and a fishing pier will open soon at Salmo Pond. Natural Areas staff continue to work on restoring park lands and collecting seeds that will be used to complete next year's projects. Staff are working closely with Friends groups to assist them on their projects.

Our boat launches, lake access points, trail systems, and dog parks are at record level use, supporting the community's need for outdoor recreation and open space. As the pandemic hit and parks became an essential resource for the community, there was very heavy trail use. The heavy use came at a time when the frost was leaving the ground, making the trails susceptible to compaction and turf damage. Some trails were covered by water and people had to find new ways to access around these sites. Our goal is to assess the trail system and make sure these facilities continue to offer good future use. We want to make sure we can provide the best park system not only today, but for the future.



Lussier Family Heritage Center Metal Roof



Get Outside program on the Lower Yahara River Trail



Babcock County Park Accessible Pier



Salmo Pond Swim

The Foundation for Dane County Parks Stands in Solidarity Against Racism

The source of our social problems are complex and rooted in centuries of racism and oppression of Black and Indigenous communities and people of color. The acts of discrimination and violence against Black Americans are shameful beyond the pale. This pattern of injustices needs to end.

The Foundation for Dane County Parks believes that Black Lives Matter and stands in solidarity with the long overdue movement to dismantle structural racism in our country's institutions.

As the conversation about making meaningful, lasting change in our communities continues, the safety of and access to nature for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) can and must be a part of the discussion. The Foundation believes that all BIPOC deserve to live in a community with healthy land and water resources as well as with access to the parks, trails, and other natural resources in the county.

Today, many people struggle to find ways to access and enjoy the natural world. Our relationship with nature is incorporated in our DNA and is essential to the health of our bodies, minds, and spirits, yet that relationship is limited by cultural, economic, racial, and geographic barriers. Many of our major cities in the U.S. have limited access to parks and natural resources for their residents, and the disparity is even more egregious for communities of color.

The Dane County Parks Department has recognized this access issue, and through programming and resources, and with our Foundation, has supported initiatives to rectify the situation locally. But we have much work to do. As a private organization supporting county parks, we want to be a part of engaging with, listening to, and learning from under-represented communities. We commit to actively identifying and reducing those barriers and more fully incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion goals into our vision and programming.

Time spent in nature is directly linked to our well-being, and parks and trails present opportunities to connect people, places, and cultures. Studies have shown that physical and mental health are improved when people have access to natural spaces. It is a logical extension of the human right to health that helps undergird a healthy community and social and racial justice.

The Foundation pledges to be part of the community change through discussions, programs, and resources to help make this movement for Black Lives Matter and incorporating access to nature the permanent fibers in Dane County and beyond.

In solidarity,
The Foundation for Dane County Parks Board of Directors

