



Foundation for Dane County Parks
5201 Fen Oak Dr. Room 208
Madison, WI 53718
foundationfordanecountyparks.org

Printed on recycled paper!     

Foundation Board Members

William Lunney, President
Thomas Thoresen, Executive Vice President
Matt Carlson, Vice President
Lon Sprecher, Vice President
Judie Pfeifer, Secretary
Randy Hackbarth, Treasurer
Darren Marsh, Ex Officio

James Hubing
Dan Miller
Gail Shea
Mike Slavney
Caryl Terrell
Michael Weber

Foundation Staff Members

Elisa Guerrero, Foundation Coordinator
Jessica Hankey, Fundraising Coordinator

Thank you to the Mad City Dream Homes real estate team for underwriting and producing this newsletter. We truly appreciate your generosity and support.



Samantha Haas - Newsletter Editor
Dan Miller - Foundation Board Member
Tracy Kapela - Newsletter Designer

madcitydreamhomes.com | (608) 852-7071



IN THIS ISSUE:

Learn more: foundationfordanecountyparks.org
Contact us: foundationfordanecountyparks@gmail.com



**2020 Grant
Recipients
Awarded**



**Healthy Parks,
Healthy You**



**Foundation
Supporter
Spotlight**

**SPRING
2021**



President's Message

As we see the early signs of Spring, it is a time to remember the partnership we as humans have with the natural world around us. County Parks offer us a perfect opportunity to renew and reconnect with nature.

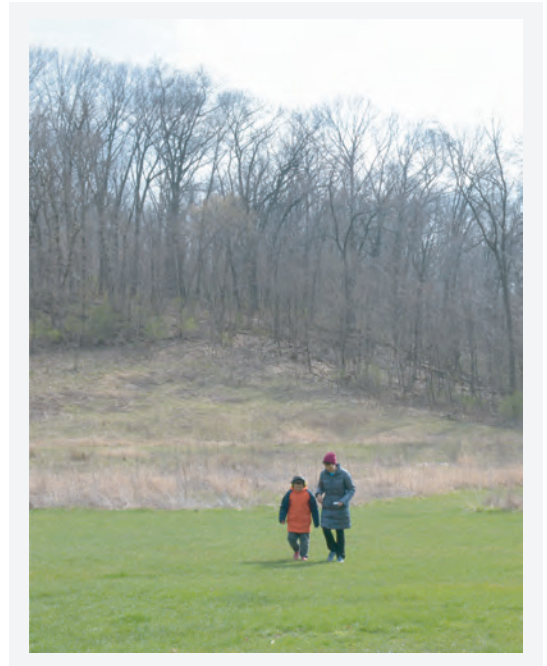
From Silverwood County Park in the southeast, to Morton Forest in the far west, to Donald Park in the southwest, to Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Indian Lake, and Lunney Lake Farm Park in the center, the county's more than 15,000 acres of land and 100 miles of trails span throughout Dane County. Each Spring, our 26 recreational parks and nearly 30 natural resource and wildlife areas are bursting with plant and wildlife diversity.

Parks are a haven for all to bask in the beauty of nature and enjoy many recreational opportunities. All of this is available due to the great work of our County Parks staff and the support of our Foundation donors, our Parks Friends groups, and our volunteers and partners.

Now, more than ever, we need our County Parks. Last year marked a historic increase in use of our County Parks, and we expect many of those new and previous visitors will return. This year and the future will present more challenges to preserve and conserve our precious natural resources, as well as opportunities for more to enjoy nature responsibly. Our Foundation, supported by our generous donors, will be there to help.

So with proper COVID guidelines, come visit parks and appreciate Mother Nature's bounty. And while you are there, look for our Healthy Parks, Healthy You program initiative (and our mascot Ginny the Groundhog) which will be seen throughout the year. Nature is calling.

William G. Lunney, Foundation President



Healthy Parks, Healthy You

Stay healthy with Ginny the Groundhog by exploring new trails and activities in Dane County Parks!



Save the date for our fall fundraising event on September 9th!

The Foundation, Dean Health Plan, SSM Health, and Dane County Parks officially announced our Healthy Parks, Healthy You initiative at a small press conference at the Lussier Family Heritage Center on March 23rd. Over the next three years, we will partner in finding new, creative ways to engage youth, seniors, and their families in improving their mental, physical, and emotional health through the use of our beautiful Dane County Parks system. Through this initiative, we hope to help area families build a greater familiarity and comfort with the variety of parks and outdoor spaces available right here in Dane County.

Throughout the year, we will raise awareness about the relationship between parks, nature, and health. Under safe public health guidelines, we will host seasonal health-related activities like popup events and a parks passport challenge. This partnership will focus on our shared values of community and stewardship. By caring deeply for the health of our environment, we will help improve the overall health of our communities.

Since January, we have been featuring four Dane County recreational parks each month to showcase the wonderful activities available in the parks year-round.

Additionally, one park hosts a StoryWalk each month, which provides a great activity for kids of all ages.

April's featured parks are Prairie Moraine, Schumacher Farm, Festge, and Scheidegger Forest. If you visit these or any other Dane County Parks during April, share your photos on Facebook using #HealthyParksHealthyYou for a chance to win prizes! We'll host prize drawings monthly. Stay tuned to our website and Facebook page for more updates.

Recognizing Our Incredible Parks Staff

Darren Marsh and Joleen Stinson Receive State Awards

The Foundation extends its congratulations to two Dane County Parks professionals, Parks Director Darren Marsh and Deputy Parks Director Joleen Stinson, who were recognized by the Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association (WPR) in February.

Darren, who has worked for the Dane County Parks Division for 28 years, received the 2020 Professional Award of Merit, the highest level of honor from the association. Darren has impacted the park and recreation field with his tireless leadership and participation, both within his community and the WPR.



"Any professional success I may have is directly due to the amazing efforts of Parks and Land and Water staff, the unwavering support and direction from County officials, a passionate corps of volunteers and partners groups, along with a very engaged community. It's due to their efforts that Dane County has developed such an amazing park system," Darren said.

Joleen joined Dane County Parks in the newly created position of Deputy Director in December and received the 2020 Outstanding Park Professional of the Year Award, which recognizes a park professional who has shown leadership and

dedication to their community and to WPR.

When introducing the award, it was stated, "Joleen knows the truth of this popular Confucius quote: 'Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.' It is obvious to all who know Joleen that she truly loves her job."

Joleen has had a long career in parks, working for the City of Sun Prairie, Village of DeForest, Rock County Parks, Village of Waunakee, UW-Extension, DNR, and the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

Darren was also the past recipient of the Professional of the Year Award in 2004 and 2015. Last year, former Parks Commission Chair Bill Lunney received the 2019 Fellowship Award and County Executive Joe Parisi was honored with the 2019 Elected Official Award. Congratulations to all the recipients! We are proud to have such well qualified and excellent parks staff directing Dane County Parks!



Rhea Stangel-Maier Retires as Volunteer Coordinator



We also want to thank Rhea Stangel-Maier, who retired in January after 27 years with Dane County Parks. She served as the Dane County Parks Adult Conservation Team Manager/Volunteer Coordinator since 2003 and had been integral to the Volunteer Program's growth to over 3,000 volunteers.

"Rhea elevated the Volunteer Program to incredible heights through hard work, endless hours, and profound commitment. Her support of the Foundation for Dane County Parks has helped us grow in our work supporting our parks," said Bill Lunney, Foundation President and former Parks Commission Chair.





What is the difference between the Foundation for Dane County Parks and the Friends of Dane County Parks Endowment?

The Foundation for Dane County Parks is the overall entity supporting all the programs of our organization, including the Friends of Dane County Parks Endowment. Simply put, the Endowment is one of the programs of the Foundation. Other programs are the Accessible Piers, the Healthy Parks, Healthy You partnership, and the Junior Naturalist program. Any unrestricted funds donated to the Foundation will be used where they are needed most, including supporting our programs and operations.

The Foundation's work provides the bulk of the support for the Endowment, whose funds are restricted to supporting projects and programs in education, interpretation, and volunteerism. Historically, endowment funds have been used to award grants to friends groups and partners for projects that further our mission.

The Foundation welcomes all donations, but encourages unrestricted donations, which provide flexibility and allow us to adjust to future needs.

Thank You to the Dreams Foundation



Through a generous \$5,000 award from the American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation to the Foundation for Dane County Parks, the team at Lussier Family Heritage Center will be launching a new environmental educational program this summer called Junior Naturalists.

The program will prepare two cohorts of youth, ages 11-14, as future leaders in conservation and natural resource management through hands-on exploration of the flora and fauna in our parks. Thank you, Dreams Foundation, for your commitment to educational equity in learning and academic achievement and support of our Foundation.

For more information visit:

LussierHeritageCenter.com/Jr-Naturalist



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:

Gary Werner and Melanie Lord

Long before their paths crossed, Gary Werner and Melanie Lord grew up with families who enjoyed the outdoors. That love and appreciation for nature and public spaces -- and each other -- continued to grow, leading them to become fervent volunteers of Dane County Parks, advocates of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, and supporters of the Foundation and Endowment.

"We see it as part of being good citizens of Dane County to be involved in helping to sustain and improve and enhance this system of parks and trails," Gary said. "You can do that through sweat equity, but if you're fortunate enough to have enough to live a comfortable life and you have extra money, you ought to be giving it back somehow or other."

Melanie's father was a professor at the University of Wisconsin, and she fondly remembers swimming and ice skating at Vilas Park when they lived in University housing, hiking with her family throughout southern Wisconsin on weekends, and taking camping trips to the east and west coasts during summer vacation. Meanwhile, Gary recalls going for Sunday afternoon drives with his parents on backroads to discover places like what are now Parfrey's Glen State Natural Area and the historic chapel at Indian Lake County Park. His father was involved early on with the first piece of the Ice Age Trail through Dane County at that park in the early 1970s.

Gary became more aware of the importance of these Dane County "gems" in connection with the Ice Age Trail through his professional involvement with the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation (now the Ice Age Trail Alliance). "One of the conscious decisions we made in the 1980s was to route the trail from Badger Prairie to Festge to Indian Lake County Parks," said Gary. The national scenic trail passes through the on-leash portion of Prairie Moraine County Park, one of Melanie's favorite places to visit.

Planting a Seed

Gary and Melanie have been volunteering throughout the county since the 1980s, beginning with prairie seed collection and plantings. They appreciate the rewards of patiently witnessing the transformation of the restored prairie and oak savanna landscape at places like the Springfield Hill Natural Resource Area, Liebetrau Prairie, Table Bluff segment, and Ice Age Trail Junction Area along the Ice Age Trail. "Watching them blossom over all these years is fabulous," Melanie said.

Gary has also been helping with prescribed burns for nearly 30 years. When they're not biking, you'll likely find them clearing invasive trees, shrubs, and weeds or burning slash piles (depending on the season) with a group of familiar faces each weekend. "People are coming out and helping consistently week after week because they believe in the land management work they are doing, but also because of the friendships," said Gary. During the pandemic, the physically-distanced yet socially-connected aspect of volunteering gave people "a good way to see one another while working together with purpose," he said.

Over the last year, Dane County Parks welcomed 4 million visitors, a 25% increase from 2019. Gary and Melanie can attest to the fact that more and more in the community of all generations have discovered the parks and trails, including a new set of one-time, regular, or (what Melanie calls) "episodically consistent" volunteers. Gary said many newbies shared that they "want to give back now, because they appreciate the essential value of these places close to home," and they realize that parks and trails "didn't just miraculously appear," rather, there are people involved in creating, maintaining, and protecting them.

Melanie said it's rewarding to be able to tell friends and coworkers that in Dane County, "we have all kinds of places you can go that are interesting, provide recreational opportunities, and even with increased use you can still have a fairly quiet experience." Gary added that "part of what makes the Madison community so wonderful is you have this very urban metropolitan city but within this rural landscape of farms, parks, and wildlife areas with scenic features like the terminal moraine and Driftless Area valleys right at your doorstep."



Gary Werner and Melanie Lord take a break from volunteering along the Ice Age Trail amid white and bur oak trees they planted 26 years ago in the Holmes Preserve on Table Bluff Road in the Town of Berry.

Making Connections

Gary attributes many of these special places to the foresight of people from nearly 100 years ago to the present, including the creators of the UW Arboretum, the contributions of Phil and Libby Lewis to the Nine Springs E-Way, and the county park commissioners and park planners who embraced “the idea of trails linking together to make a network of continuous routes.” He credits his experience with national trails with becoming more aware of the relationship between state and county parks and connecting places together via the trails.

Foundation President Bill Lunney, who served as Parks Commission Chair for 30 years, referred to Gary as “the conscience of the county parks board” because of his fierce advocacy work. Gary “consistently went to bat for the county parks budget and fellow travelers, arguing for the importance of aggressively acquiring more land for not just the Ice Age Trail.” And while having strong support for parks with elected officials is advantageous, Melanie said the private sector provides a “cushion” when the public sector is “fickle” and budgets are tight. She said that contributing to nonprofits such as the Foundation for Dane County Parks and volunteering also shows that “private citizens and organizations are equally invested and caring about those resources.”

Gary, who served as the founding Executive Director of the Partnership for the National Trails System, said that the Foundation and Dane County Parks have emulated the “public-private partnership model, one of the most wonderful aspects of the National Trails System, where both partners are bringing resources to the table to help the cause of the public lands being sustained.” What makes this relationship work is that the parks department has “cultivated a culture of empowering volunteers to take on real significant stewardship of these places,” which has enabled the acquisition of more land and is mirrored by the increase of volunteers and contributed hours each year.

To read the full article, including Gary's involvement with the grants advisory committee, the importance of the endowment, and Gary and Melanie's hopes for the future of Dane County Parks, please visit our blog at: foundationfordanecountyparks.org/blog.

Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy Awarded

The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy have been hard at work to improve their beloved park. In recognition of their work, they recently received the 2020 Business Honor Roll Award from the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) and the Rural Project of the Year award from Clean Lakes Alliance.

The WASB Business Honor Roll award was given to the Friends because of their longstanding partnership with the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy work with the school district on a variety of environmental education programs that have taught students about restoration work, nature writing and photography, and even data collection around bird-window collisions.

The Friends also received the Clean Lake Alliance Rural Project of the Year award in recognition of their "Seed the Need" campaign. The campaign raised over \$25,000 to create a "Platinum Prairie" on the 160-acre Acker property that was recently added to the Conservancy. This property, just to the north of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, has often been a source of phosphorus-heavy runoff into the seasonal stream that runs through the park. By restoring the property with native prairie plants, the Friends will improve stormwater infiltration in the area, support diverse habitat for wildlife, and add to the beauty of the Conservancy.



2020 Grant Recipients

In January, the Foundation for Dane County Parks announced the recipients of our second annual round of grants, funded by the Friends of Dane County Parks Endowment Fund. The grants totaled \$7,981 and were awarded to 5 nonprofit groups who work to support and enhance volunteerism and interpretation, as well as provide educational programming within the Dane County Parks system.

"Now more than ever we need healthy County Parks, and Dane County is fortunate that our County Parks are supported by a cadre of volunteers and Friends groups. We are pleased to make these investments in the community so our natural resources can continue to thrive for many years to come," said Bill Lunney, the Foundation's President.

The 2020 recipients were:

Anderson Park Friends (\$960): To purchase equipment for their food pantry gardens, allowing them to serve two more local food pantries.

Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area (\$1,893): To update stewardship and visitor educational materials.

Friends of McCarthy Youth and Conservation Park (\$2,000): For equipment to groom and maintain winter ski and snowshoe trails.

Friends of Silverwood Park (\$2,000): For a volunteer recruitment and retention program to build volunteer support.

Ice Age Trail Alliance (\$1,128): For an educational effort to stop the spread of invasive species along various segments of the Ice Age Trail.



The five recipient groups are part of a strong volunteer network that help maintain and improve the parks and natural resource areas within Dane County. The Foundation is proud to support the work of these volunteers and their efforts to best serve the parks system and the Dane County community.

Survey: Madison Metro Transportation and Park Access



The City of Madison recently announced a redesign of Madison Metro's transit service. Changes in ridership due to the pandemic have provided insights into how Madison's public transit could better serve the community.

To bring the perspectives of parks users into the community engagement process, Dane County Parks and the Sierra Club Four Lakes Chapter have partnered to gather people's stories about where and how bus transportation access to parks could be improved. They are collecting stories through May 15, and you can participate by visiting danecountyparks.com/survey.

Often, conversations about public transit revolve around access to jobs and essential services, but Madison has an opportunity to connect bus routes to our County Parks as well. There are several Dane County Parks in the Madison area that are close to existing bus routes but could be better connected. Lunney Lake Farm Park, Pheasant Branch Conservancy, and Badger Prairie County Park are all on the periphery of Madison Metro's service area. These parks are all within a mile of the closest bus stop, but the bus route might have limited to no service on weekends or walking from the bus stop to the park might not be pedestrian-friendly. People could reach parks more easily with closer bus stops serviced by buses every day of the week.

Connecting County Parks to bus routes is an important step in making them accessible to those without access to a car. Changes to certain Madison Metro routes would be a first step towards making access to Dane County Parks more equitable. Stories shared with Dane County Parks and the Sierra Club could help make these changes a reality, so please share your stories!

Board Member Announcements

The Foundation is welcoming a new member to the Board of Directors as long-serving member Andy Lewis steps down from his role. Our new board member, Dan Miller, is a REALTOR, broker, and owner of the Mad City Dream Homes team with RE/MAX Preferred. Environmental preservation has always been important to Dan, who has been involved in the Foundation for Dane County Parks fundraising committee since 2017 and joined the Board and diversity, equity, and inclusion committee in 2021. Dan and the Mad City Dream Homes team support the Foundation's newsletter, among other projects. Dan's goal is to inspire other local professionals to use their businesses as vehicles for positive change in the community.

Andy Lewis has been a valuable member of the Foundation's Board since its inception, was instrumental in starting the Friends of Dane County Parks Endowment fund, and was an active member of various Foundation committees. Most recently, Andy spearheaded the fundraising effort to restore the Lewis E-Way model, which will be installed at the Lussier Family Heritage Center. We would like to thank Andy for his many years of dedicated work and advocacy on behalf of the Foundation.

