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AULLWOOD PHOTO CONTEST HIGHLIGHTS LOCAL TALENT

ENGLEWOOD – Local photographers have captured many stunning images of the MetroParks, but recently, three were given honors as top park shutterbugs. Bill Franz, Ray Mueller and Heather Smith secured first, second and third place, respectively, in the annual Aullwood Gardens MetroPark photo contest.

“We wanted to capture the beauty of Aullwood Gardens MetroPark in all four seasons,” says Betty Hoevel, adult education supervisor for the MetroParks who helped organize the contest. “All contest entries will be on display in the Aull house for visitors to enjoy. Be sure to visit on any Sunday in April from 1 to 4 p.m.”

Local professional photographer Jim Crotty was this year’s guest contest judge. He says when it came to pick the winners, it was all about the light. “The winning shot made me yearn for the beautiful light of early morning and early evening in the summer,” Crotty says. “The most beautiful images are often more about the haunting qualities of subdued, indirect light than the actual subject. When something so naturally beautiful is backlit with that type of light, the resulting image is pure magic.”

Ironically, Franz says he almost didn’t submit the winning photo. “(The winning photo) wasn’t my favorite, and I almost left it out of the body of work I submitted,” he says. Franz, who has lived in Dayton nearly 30 years, says he and his wife purchased digital cameras to help them in their new hobby – identifying butterfly species. In addition to providing great sites for spotting colorful creatures, the MetroParks have been the setting of other important family activities. “Both of my daughters were married in the MetroParks – one at Cox Arboretum and one at Wegerzyn Gardens,” Franz says. “I have done a lot of photography at both of those locations, but I hadn’t spent much time at Aullwood Gardens MetroPark. That’s why I was interested in this photo contest. I thought it would push me into visiting that park regularly.”

It didn’t take much convincing for Smith to get to Aullwood Garden MetroPark; she lives close by in Englewood. “I love that a peaceful space is never far away,” Smith says. “The parks are perfect for my photography and my family’s love of nature and hiking.” Smith, who has been snapping pictures since high school, says the most difficult part of the contest was trying to determine which of her photos were the best. “Aullwood Garden MetroPark is beautiful year ’round, so the photo opportunities are many.”

Mueller agrees. “The MetroParks offer an abundant selection of photographic opportunities, all of which I enjoy,” says this Dayton resident, who came to the area in 1991 and enjoys spending most of his time behind a lens now that he is retired from the Air Force. Mueller also nabbed the





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distinction of claiming fourth place as well as second in this contest. What's his secret to taking great photos? "Good photography is not a secret," Mueller says. "It requires pre-planning, patience and a working knowledge of the photographic tools available but not forgetting the fact that the image is more important than the technical aspects of photography."

Crotty also shared a few tips for hopeful photogs:

- Define the subject. Too many people try to include too much within a photograph. I also encourage photographers to always look on the edges of their frame for visual elements that detract from the subject and the composition.
- Bad light makes for a bad photograph, no matter how attractive the subject. The best nature and landscape photographs are almost always captured in the "margins of the day" - very, very early (before sunrise) or very late in the day, even an hour after sunset.
- Always, always shoot with a tripod. Shooting in the most pleasing light - low light in morning and evening - requires slow shutter speeds. A good, quality tripod (one which comes to eye level without killing your back) opens up an entirely new creative range for excellent landscape photography.
- Make the background and foreground work for you. Use the aperture priority mode on the camera to blur a background when you want more emphasis on the subject. Be careful of the elements in the background that could possibly lead the eye away from the subject.
- Edit, edit, edit - preferably when out shooting. Digital photography is definitely more cost-effective than film. The problem is that digital memory is so cheap that amateur photographers overwhelm themselves with too many images.
- Camera flash can be just as important outside as it is indoors. When outdoor subjects are in shadows, or overtaken by very bright backgrounds, use the camera flash to provide just a touch of "fill" light. Pictures of both people and animals should always have a "catch light" in the eyes.

Crotty also teaches photography courses through his company, Picture Ohio. Park patrons looking to sharpen their photography skills also are invited to participate in any number of available classes offered through Five Rivers MetroParks. MetroParks classes range in degrees of expertise and most of the programs are offered free of charge. To find out what photography classes are offered, pick up a copy of ParkWays at a





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MetroPark visitor center or kiosk, or download a free copy from the web site www.metroarks.org/parkways. The web site also organizes activities by interest groups. Simply go to www.metroarks.org and then move the cursor over the "Get Outside" menu. Choose "Things to See and Do" from the fly-out menu, then select "View by Topic," and finally, choose "Photography" from the menu. Park patrons also are invited to share their pictures on the MetroParks' Flickr group (www.flickr.com/metroarks). Pictures from this site are often used in official MetroParks publications, credited to the photographer.

ABOUT FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

Five Rivers MetroParks focuses on three areas – conservation, recreation and education – as part of its role as steward of greater Dayton's public lands. Established in 1963 through the efforts of forward-thinking citizens concerned about preserving green space and natural areas, Five Rivers MetroParks has grown to a nationally renowned park system composed of natural area parks, gardens, sensitive river corridors, urban parks and a network of recreation trails. Educational programs and recreational opportunities are offered year-round for all ages. And, diverse natural habitats are being protected and cared for today to assure their future existence. To learn more about Five Rivers MetroParks, log onto www.metroarks.org or call (937) 275-PARK.

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