

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

HISTORY



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BEFORE THE BEGINNING

THE 1913 FLOOD

On Sunday, March 23, 1913, heavy rain began to fall throughout the length of the Great Miami Valley. By Wednesday, the muddy, swirling water had reached a depth of ten feet in downtown Dayton. The levees had failed. Debris and drowned animals littered the streets when the water receded on Friday. Property damage was in the millions. Survivors promised "Never again."

FLOOD CONTROL SYSTEM

Within two months, the citizens of Dayton raised more than two million dollars to plan and construct a flood control system. In 1914, the State of Ohio passed the Conservancy Act, which authorized stream drainage areas to form flood control agencies. On June 28, 1915, the Miami Conservancy District was created and headquartered in Dayton.

The Conservancy Board hired Arthur E. Morgan as chief engineer. His flood control solution consisted of five earthen retarding dams (four in Montgomery County), protecting levees and channel improvements. This system, completed in 1922, was unique but practical. Dayton and the Great Miami River Valley were protected from a repetition of the 1913 flood.

RECREATION AREAS

Morgan was not only an outstanding engineer, but a conservationist. Due in large part to his efforts, the impoundment areas above the dams and the stream flood plains were retained by the Miami Conservancy District and made available to the public for recreational pursuits. In the 1930s, the land at Taylorsville, Huffman and Englewood Dams was developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.). From their camp at Taylorsville Dam, 200 enrollees and supervisors built trails, picnic areas and shelter houses. At the same time, the National Youth Administration made similar improvements at Germantown Dam.

As a result of the flood, the control system and the development funded by two Federal agencies, the residents of Montgomery County had four natural preserves, without direct cost to themselves. In the meantime, other counties in Ohio had been at work preserving open space by utilizing a state law enacted in 1917. This law authorized counties to acquire land "for conversion into forest reserves and for the conservation of natural resources." This was Chapter 1545 of the Ohio Revised Code known as the Park District law. To provide funding to achieve these objectives, residents of the county were required to pass a tax levy on real estate in the county.

MORE OPEN SPACE NEEDED

In 1959, the Regional Transportation Committee, encompassing Montgomery and Greene County, was organized. It discovered that open space was rapidly vanishing from the region. To evaluate the problem, an Open Space Study Committee was formed. Harold R. Freiheit, a landscape architect and land planner, was hired to direct the study. Results of the study were published under the title "A Legacy for the Future: A Plan for Open Space in Greene-Montgomery County." It pointed out that, in a few years, at the current rate of growth, there would be little open space left in the Dayton Metropolitan area. Existing parks would not be adequate to meet the needs of the growing community.

At about the same time, W.H. White wrote "The Exploding Metropolis," which also expressed concerns that the outdoors was being threatened and open land was disappearing. The book crystallized many people's thinking, including Glenn Thompson, editor of the Dayton Journal-Herald. Thompson, a Tennessee native who had come to the Journal-Herald by way of the Cincinnati Enquirer, was a lifelong hunter and outdoorsman. He appreciated the importance of green space and had enjoyed the Hamilton County Park District. He wanted a similar facility in Montgomery County.

Thompson was invited to speak to the Garden Club of Dayton about the crisis in open space. He concluded by saying, "Of course, I'm wasting my time talking to you about open space. This group is interested only in your children and your gardens." But he was wrong. Mrs. Jean V. Woodhull took the challenge and asked what they could do. Thompson suggested they could form a Save Open Space Committee.

Not long afterward, the Garden Club of Dayton and the Four Seasons Garden Club sponsored a meeting at the Patterson Homestead with Felix Rimberg as guest speaker. Rimberg had been involved in Freiheit's study and was chairman of a group that later became the Regional Planning Commission. Representatives from the garden clubs, Audubon Society, Isaac Walton League and the business community were present. Everyone who entered the meeting signed a yellow tablet strategically placed on a table near the room's entrance. After Rimberg's speech, Jean Woodhull announced that those who had signed the yellow tablet were now members of the Save Open Space Committee and should go forth and assist in saving green space. Thompson was elected president of the committee.

The Save Open Space Committee researched agencies that could promote the preservation of open space. The state, city, county and a park district were considered. Ultimately, it was decided that a park district would fulfill the community needs for open space. Twelve Ohio counties had already formed park districts for this purpose, with Cuyahoga being the first in 1917.

THE BEGINNING OF THE PARK DISTRICT

To create a park district, at least one township or city within the county had to submit an application to the County Probate Court. Woodhull recruited Charles S. Bridge, a local attorney who was deeply involved in community affairs, to succeed Thompson as President of the Save Open Space Committee and draft the petition. He persuaded seventeen cities and townships in Montgomery County to sign, representing 83% of the county population.

"Glenn Thompson had the unique faculty of getting things going by getting a group together and agreeing on an idea. Glenn would then get somebody else to take over the group and go on to another idea. When he wanted something you really knew it." - Harry S. Price, Jr.

Thompson and Bridge presented the application to Probate Court Judge Neal F. Zimmers and a hearing was held. Overwhelming support made it easy for Zimmers to approve the formation of the park district, which officially began on April 8, 1963. Today, many refer to Glenn Thompson as the "father of the park district." Thompson credited nationwide concern about "a crisis in open space" and movements to preserve natural areas for contributing momentum to local activists.

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

After creating the park district, Judge Zimmers was required to appoint three residents of the county to serve as the Board of Park Commissioners to determine policy, approve expenditures and employ a staff. Thompson recommended William P. Patterson and Harry S. Price, Jr. to Judge Zimmers. Thompson did not suggest himself, although he probably expected to be named.

Patterson was the first member appointed. He was president of Specialty Papers Company and a long-time community activist. He accepted the appointment because he shared Thompson's belief in the importance of open space.

Judge Zimmers then surprised everyone. He appointed Charles S. Bridge on the same day. Zimmers explained his choice was based on Bridge's legal knowledge and as a way to have both political parties represented.

Eight days later, Harry Price became the third board member. As an officer in Price Brothers Company and an avid outdoorsman, Price believed he owed it to the community to continue to take an active role in preserving open space in the Miami Valley. It had been Price's foresight that had turned a gravel pit into Eastwood Lake Park for the City of Dayton. (Through an agreement with the City of Dayton, Eastwood is presently managed by Five Rivers MetroParks.)

"No one has ever used the Park District as a political power base or to benefit one area of the county at the expense of another. This is one reason to retain the appointed board in favor of an elected one." - William P. Patterson

The Commissioners held their first meeting on June 18, 1963. Patterson was elected president. He ruefully remembered, "We knew nothing, had no money, no parks."

The first problem faced by the Board, of knowing nothing, was soon resolved by a seemingly unrelated event and a chance meeting. In Columbus, Ohio, the new mayor tried to replace the superintendent of Parks and Forestry with a political friend. Just as the Columbus Civil Service Commission and the park superintendent were about to initiate a lawsuit, a chance meeting occurred in the bar at Dayton's old Gibbons Hotel. Jackson Perry, Dayton's Director of Parks and Recreation, ran into Glenn Thompson. Perry discussed the situation in Columbus and mentioned that he thought Columbus' Parks Superintendent, J. Richard Lawwill, was one of the best park men in the country. Thompson placed a call to Lawwill right away and, as Lawwill remembered, "persuaded me that beating Columbus politics would be an empty victory." Thompson then suggested to Patterson that Lawwill be interviewed for the job of director-secretary of the park district. The Park Commissioners met Lawwill, who had a Landscape Architect degree from the University of Cincinnati. His background also included working for the National Park Service during the Civilian Conservation Corps period. He had designed the master plans for Taylorsville, Englewood and Huffman. After two meetings with the park commissioners, Lawwill was hired and began his duties as director-secretary on May 2, 1964.

EARLY FUNDING

The problem of having no money was not as easy to solve. The County Commissioners appropriated \$18,000 and a small office in the Old Courthouse when the fledgling park district officially opened for business. (The auditor of the State of Ohio later ruled that the grant was improper and the \$18,000 had to be repaid.)

FIRST LEVY ATTEMPT

To insure adequate and consistent funding, the park district (MetroParks) placed a \$0.3 million, 10-year levy on the November 1964 ballot, just eight months after hiring the director. Miriam Rosenthal, a much-admired public relations person, rallied colleagues in business and industry to advise and assist in passing the levy. Glenn Thompson gave news space and editorial support. National Cash Register sponsored a breakfast at its Sugar Camp for several hundred community leaders to hear about the park district (MetroParks), meet its director, and to discuss the upcoming levy with Vic Cassano, the levy Campaign Chairman. The campaign slogan was "Vote Green." But time was short. Other governmental

levies were on the ballot and the park district (MetroParks), being merely a concept, was difficult to sell to voters. The levy, with a 49% vote in favor, failed to pass.

The park commissioners, in assessing the election results, decided that a credible showing had been made and another attempt should be pursued as soon as possible. The next election, in May 1965, was a primary election and state law prohibited park district levies in a primary election. This meant the campaign would have to go on hold until November 1965. It was feared that momentum would be lost.

Again, Glenn Thompson intervened. He called Governor James H. Rhodes and asked him to propose special legislation permitting the Montgomery County Park District (MetroParks) to place a levy on the May ballot. Thompson pointed out this could be achieved by adding it to the agenda for the lame duck session of the legislature already called. Rhodes agreed, providing State Senator Charles Whalen would explain the need. Thompson arranged for Senator Whalen to appear in Governor Rhodes' office by the following Monday morning and the special privilege was voted by the State Legislature. (Some years later, the law was changed to allow all park district levies to be voted on in primary elections.)

DONATIONS TO THE PARK DISTRICT

To keep the park district (MetroParks) alive during the time between the two levy campaigns, William Patterson persuaded Eugene Kettering to donate \$250,000 to acquire land. Kettering stipulated that his contribution be used to purchase land "up north" because most of his philanthropy had been in the southern part of the county. An aerial survey conducted by Kettering, Lawwill and Patterson in Kettering's private plane led to the acquisition of properties totaling 223 acres on April 1, 1965. This area was originally called Drylick Run and later became the north-central section of present Carriage Hill MetroPark.

In addition to Kettering's donation, Marie Aull donated \$50,000 to assist the park district (MetroParks) in December 1964.

SECOND LEVY CAMPAIGN

Vic Cassano was again asked to chair the levy campaign and Glenn Thompson played an active role in developing campaign strategy. The theme for the May 1965 campaign was "Vote Green - It's Now or Never." This time everybody with an interest went all-out to assure victory. The campaign was a primer for passing levies. Voters were canvassed, a speaker's bureau was established, telephone banks were set up, politicians were approached for their support and church leaders were asked to speak out from their pulpits. When the votes were counted, the park district's (MetroParks') \$0.3 million levy had passed with a 52% vote in favor.

EARLY LAND ACQUISITION

In 1965, the park district (MetroParks) set a land acquisition goal of 8500 acres. This figure was based upon the projected population growth within the county and Freiheit's recommendation of one acre per 1000 people. The policy was also established to keep 80% of park district (MetroParks) lands in a natural state with the remaining 20% to be developed for picnic areas, roads, nature centers and parking lots. Over the years, that policy has been maintained.

Lawwill established criteria for buying park land as well as a master plan for park locations so the entire county would be served. Land acquisition was a priority. Getting ahead of development was important because land values were rising fast. The task force for buying land was composed of Leon Wilder of Oakwood who brokered the land for a greatly reduced commission of 2%, Paul Lacouture, an attorney with Smith and Schnacke, who handled the legal work, and Lawwill.

"Like the mythical Phoenix bird which arose from fire and ashes to begin another life, Possum Creek arose from a grossly abused tract of land to become a beautiful green space..." - J. Richard Lawwill

CARRIAGE HILL, ENGLEWOOD & POSSUM CREEK

METROPARKS

Acquisition was begun in those areas of the county where potential development was the greatest. Huber Heights was growing rapidly. Drylick Run (now Carriage Hill MetroPark) was first to be acquired in April 1965. At the same time this purchase was made a small parcel of 29 acres was also purchased to begin Englewood MetroPark. Possum Creek MetroPark followed with the purchase of 275 acres on February 2, 1966. This area was not in the original master plan which called for a green space north of Trotwood to serve the western part of the county.

However, a comparison of topography and land costs, as well as the strategic location of Possum Creek to serve the western half of the county, led to its selection. Although much of the land had been used as a landfill and hog farm and areas had been stripped of topsoil, it had potential. The staff immediately tackled the job of cleaning up the site. In the years that followed, additional purchases added to the size and diversity of the park.

SUGARCREEK METROPARK

In the mid-1960s, land prices in Centerville and Washington Township had already escalated beyond the reach of the park district (MetroParks). To serve the suburban population, Sugarcreek MetroPark in

Greene County was acquired in October 1966. By December 15, 1966, Sugarcreek had grown to 540 acres.

LEASING RECREATION AREAS

In 1967, the park district (MetroParks) leased the recreation areas at Englewood, Taylorsville, Huffman and Germantown Dams from the Miami Conservancy District. The conservancy district had supported the creation of the Park District (MetroParks) since it lacked the resources to fully develop the recreation potential of its areas and its main mission was flood control.

The responsibilities of operating the leased areas placed a huge budgetary strain on the new park district (MetroParks), which was primarily involved in acquiring land. Now it had to operate four partially developed parks.

PARK DISTRICT'S FIRST STAFF

During this period of rapid acquisition, new faces joined the staff. Scott Huston was hired in September 1965. He left the Dayton Parks to respond to Lawwill's call to "come along with me" because "great things are happening." He began as assistant director. The staff consisted of Lawwill, Huston and Clara Wine, the park district's (MetroParks') dedicated secretary for many years. Huston began his duties by leading walks and "bushwhacking" trails in the parks. Ralph Scott, a naturalist with the Dayton Museum of Natural History, joined the park district (MetroParks) on a part-time basis to lead walks. Huston, Scott and Lawwill led walks on every weekend for two years. Scott became the park district's (MetroParks) chief naturalist in 1967.

Also in 1967, Dane W. Mutter joined the park district (MetroParks). There were few walking trails and only one naturalist on the payroll to interpret the areas. Mutter began planning additional hiking trails, developing education programs and designing land use management plans.

In May 1969, Huston left the park district (MetroParks) to work with a park district in Wisconsin.

Melvin Diehl joined the park district (MetroParks) as assistant director in September 1969. Diehl took responsibility for writing grant applications and negotiating land acquisitions. He also designed investment programs for the park district (MetroParks), trust funds and other income. Diehl's many years of experience in the business world before entering park work gave him an ideal background for these responsibilities.

Lawwill, Wilder, Lacouture and Diehl continued aggressive land purchases to meet the goal of 8500 acres. Diehl agreed it was good policy to be open with the public about the park district's (MetroParks) master plan of development and many acquisitions were made by referrals. The approach in most cases

was the same: appraise the parcel, offer fair market value, assume commissions and fees, arrange maximum tax advantage to the seller and offer continued occupancy (even for life). This approach was highly successful, although no two deals were the same and some deals took years to consummate.

EMINENT DOMAIN

From 1963 to 1986, the park district (MetroParks) only had to use the right of eminent domain once. It occurred in the late sixties and involved a 100-acre parcel on Meeker Road that abutted Englewood MetroPark and Aullwood Audubon Center. It was an important part of the Englewood master plan. The owner proposed building 100 houses with a waste treatment plant and sewer system draining into Aullwood Audubon Center property. While negotiations were underway, the developer began bulldozing trees on the parcel.

This led to a frantic call from Marie Aull to Lawwill and Huston. Lacouture, the park district's (MetroParks') attorney, was contacted by Lawwill. Lacouture arranged for a cease-and-desist order from Judge Carl D. Kessler. When he served the order, Lacouture was threatened by the owner and felt sure the order would not be obeyed. Lawwill and Lacouture then convinced Judge Kessler to go to the site. The judge demanded all activity stop and the destruction of the woods was prevented. (In 1989, the right of eminent domain was exercised again - at Carriage Hill.)

THE SEVENTIES

SI BURICK ON THE BOARD

Commissioner Bridge died unexpectedly in 1970. He was succeeded on the Board of Park Commissioners by Dayton Daily News sportswriter Si Burick. Burick observed later that the park district (MetroParks) "was not my thing, but I was attracted to it." Thus Burick the sportswriter became, somewhat to his surprise, Burick the conservationist. Shortly before his death in 1986, Burick recalled his delight in being appointed to the board, "I want to thank the park district (MetroParks) for asking me; and I want to thank myself for accepting."

COX ARBORETUM BECAME A METROPARK

In December 1972, the park district (MetroParks) experienced new growth when Cox Arboretum became part of the park district (MetroParks). Ten years earlier, Woodhull, Jean Mahoney and others had talked James Cox, Jr. into donating his farm south of town for an arboretum. In addition to the donation, Cox also established a \$300,000 trust fund to help support it. Other donations followed. In 1965, forty silver linden trees (now the symbol of Cox Arboretum) were donated by the Rike family in memory of Mrs. Frederick Rike and in 1972, Lenore Thomas donated funds for two new greenhouses.

1974 LEVY PASSED

1974 was the year for a new levy campaign. Vic Cassano was again campaign chairman. Much of the campaign was centered on Si Burick. The park district (MetroParks) decided to go for a renewal of the existing levy (\$0.3 million) with an addition of \$0.2 million, the permissible limit at the time. "In November of 1974," Lawwill recounted, "I experienced my 'last hurrah' - my last levy campaign." The levy passed with a 62% vote. The funds for the park district (MetroParks) were now doubled.

"As I look back, I am awed that it all came together the way it did. I remember the amazing things that unfolded: the multitude of people from all walks of life who rallied to our cause, the talented staff, the generosity of the taxpayers, the thousands of beautiful acres we were able to acquire, and the caliber of people appointed to serve on our park board." - J. Richard Lawwill

SCHMIDT BECAME DIRECTOR

Lawwill retired in July 1976 and Donald P. Schmidt became director in August of that year. Schmidt was a fitting choice for the job. He was a graduate of Pennsylvania State University in Park and Recreation

Administration with graduate work in the field. He had served in several positions in the State of Ohio, including Lawwill's former job in Columbus, and with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

FUNDRAISING

Inflation during the seventies, however, brought the park district (MetroParks) to a financial pinch. This led Director Donald Schmidt to embark on a fundraising campaign. He set a goal of raising \$500,000 a year beyond the levy income. Most of this would come from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund administered by the state. The rest would have to be provided by donations, income from trust funds and the local government fund.

AULLWOOD GARDENS BECOMES A METROPARK

In 1977, another horticultural facility was added when Marie Aull conveyed her home and 30-acre garden to the park district (MetroParks). Later, Park Commissioner Siebenthaler considered it a "world-class garden." He also noted that Mrs. Aull was familiar with the leading gardens of the world — even contributing to the design of some. Marie Aull had been instrumental in training members of the staff in the nuances of estate gardening. Siebenthaler commented, "It's going to be a tremendous challenge to us to maintain the garden so we can look back and say, 'We did it right.' It's not going to be easy, but it's going to be enjoyable."

FINANCES

Until about 1978, sixty to seventy percent of park district (MetroParks) income went into land acquisition. Subsequently, that percentage had to go into maintenance, programs, roads, picnic shelters, restrooms and visitor and nature centers. Overdevelopment became a concern, but facilities were carefully located so as not to encroach on sensitive natural areas.

The park district (MetroParks) made a request to participate in local government funds in 1979. Those responsible for distribution granted the park district \$179,000. Schmidt calculated that the amount should have been closer to \$300,000. He advised the Board of Park Commissioners to sue. They did and they won. (A new formula has been developed as a result of the law suit guaranteeing MetroParks a fixed percentage of available funds.)

"How much development can you do without overloading ecosystems? I don't think anybody knows the answer to that. More field research is necessary before development; local universities should be enlisted for help, trading off their expertise for the field laboratories the parks can provide." - Dane W. Mutter

MATURING IN THE EIGHTIES

RUTH MEAD JOINED THE BOARD

William P. Patterson retired in 1981 and was succeeded on the Board of Park Commissioners by Ruth C. Mead. When Mead was appointed to the board, her main knowledge of the park district (MetroParks) centered on Sugarcreek MetroPark where she and her children had spent many enjoyable hours. Mead considered herself a stalwart defender of the purposes of the park district (MetroParks). She described these as: preserve natural resources "forever wild"; provide opportunities for passive recreation (such as hiking, canoeing and bird watching); exercise land stewardship; and educate the public about the importance of open space and nature.

MEETING THE LAND ACQUISITION GOAL

During the early eighties, it became apparent to the board and to Schmidt that, although park district (MetroParks) acreage totaled over 6000 acres, the goal of 8500 acres of open space managed by the park district (MetroParks) was going to be difficult, if not impossible, to reach given the high cost of land in the county and the budget crunch.

"Marie Aull never mentions her generosity and few people know how much she does for the community." - Ruth C. Mead

SYCAMORE STATE PARK

Meanwhile, the Newfields area west of Trotwood came on the market. Knowing that the park district (MetroParks) could not possibly afford to purchase and develop it, Schmidt approached the State of Ohio to convert the 2200-acre parcel into a state park. Larry Christman, a state representative from Englewood, was an important supporter of the state park idea. He introduced a bill in the state legislature for the land to become a state park and got an appropriation of \$4,000,000. Sycamore State Park was authorized and purchased. Total open space acreage in the Dayton area thus came very close to the goal of 8500 acres established in 1965.

1984 LEVY RENEWED

The park district's (MetroParks') \$0.5 million levy was renewed by the voters for another ten years in May 1984. This renewal provided the same funding as before, enough to maintain current levels of service and provide for land acquisitions to round out existing parks and eliminate in-holdings.

ROBERT SIEBENTHALER BECOMES A BOARD MEMBER

With a successful levy campaign completed, Burick retired from the board in 1984 and Robert K. Siebenthaler was appointed. Siebenthaler was especially interested in managing park district (MetroParks) facilities to provide a variety of habitats. He pointed out, "Left alone, these areas would return to forest. That's very limiting. Many species of wildlife can't exist in the woods. They exist in other types of ecosystems - like prairies, water, meadows. We must try to maintain a diversification which will better preserve the wonders of nature."

FORMER PARK DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

In 1985, the park district (MetroParks) purchased the George Leland family home on Siebenthaler Avenue, from the Dayton Museum of Natural History. During the sixties, the Leland family had donated their home to the museum. The park district (MetroParks) leased the building from the museum in 1967 and established its headquarters there. After consulting with the Leland family, the home and acreage was purchased from the museum.

As of December 31, 1986, the park district (MetroParks) had acquired the following:

- Carriage Hill MetroPark - 868 acres owned
- Cox Arboretum MetroPark - 159 acres owned
- Englewood MetroPark - 1538 acres (722 owned, 714 leased, 31 owned at Aullwood Gardens, 71 leased at Pig Eye)
- Germantown MetroPark - 1316 acres (940 owned, 376 leased)
- Huffman MetroPark - 282 acres leased
- Possum Creek MetroPark - 591 acres (518 owned, 73 owned at Crains Run)
- Sugarcreek MetroPark - 596 acres owned
- Taylorsville MetroPark - 856 acres (117 owned, 748 leased)

MARVIN OLINSKY BECAME DIRECTOR

On January 31, 1987, Donald P. Schmidt retired as director, closing an era of the park district's (MetroParks') history. Marvin Olinsky was appointed as the third Director-Secretary effective December 1, 1986. Olinsky, a graduate of Delaware Valley College (B.S. in Horticulture) and Lehigh University (Masters in Education), had served as director of Cox Arboretum from July 1980 until his appointment.

PREPARING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY - "PARKS 2000"

"PARKS 2000" LEVY PASSED

On May 3, 1988, the Park District (MetroParks) passed a \$0.7 million, ten-year replacement levy, canceling the then current \$0.5 million levy. In order to promote and pass the levy, the Vote Green Finance Committee was formed with Richard Gump serving as treasurer and Gerald S. Office, Jr. as fund-raising chairman. Harry S. Price, Jr. and Doris Ponitz served as honorary co-chairs. "Yes Parks" was adopted as the slogan of the campaign and the park district's (MetroParks') levy pledge was to continue providing clean, safe, well-managed parks with innovative programming and activities for all ages, and to pursue an aggressive land stewardship program.

JEAN WOODHULL ON THE BOARD

With the new levy in place, Ruth C. Mead retired from the Board of Park Commissioners on June 12, 1989, and Jean V. Woodhull was appointed by Judge George J. Gounaris to serve as the third member of the board. Woodhull had long been dedicated to the park district (MetroParks) and a "green" community. Her involvement dated back to the early efforts to create a park district to serve the Greater Dayton area and she enthusiastically embraced this opportunity to serve on the board.

EASTWOOD BECAME A METROPARK

As part of a growing focus on rivers, Eastwood Park was viewed as an ideal site for park district (MetroParks) involvement. On April 1, 1990 Eastwood became part of the park district (MetroParks) through a lease agreement with the City of Dayton running until the year 2089. Eastwood Lake (also known as the Dayton Hydrobowl) came under park district (MetroParks) management on April 1, 1992. Security, upgraded maintenance and family-oriented activities were goals set for the site.

JEFF LELAND - COMMISSIONER

Park Commissioner Harry Price had been an enthusiastic supporter of the addition of Eastwood. With this accomplished and direction coming into focus for the future of the Park District (MetroParks), Price retired from the Board of Park Commissioners on October 1, 1990, after 27 years of service. Jeff Leland, appointed by Judge George J. Gounaris, became the newest member of the board.

"VOTE GREEN" LEVY

On May 3, 1994, Montgomery County voters were asked to approve a ten-year, \$1.2 million (\$0.7 million replacement and \$0.5 million additional) levy that would cancel the existing \$0.7 million levy. The purpose of the levy was to provide additional funds that would be needed to implement a plan to protect and enhance the area's major river corridors, while continuing to provide a high level of services at existing park sites. The "Vote Green" campaign centered on the vision of a "tapestry of greenways" in the Miami Valley utilizing river corridors and multi-use pathways to link parks, public facilities and communities. Harry Price and Horace M. Huffman served as honorary co-chairpersons of the Vote Green Committee and their sons, Marlay B. Price and Tony Huffman, served as campaign co-chairpersons. Richard Gump provided assistance again as treasurer. When all the votes were in and counted, although close, the levy failed to pass, by just 126 votes. Analysis of the campaign and results led to the conclusion that many voters, although they supported parks, were somewhat confused as to how a "tapestry of green" would benefit them and specifically how their tax dollars would be used.

NOVEMBER 1994 LEVY PASSED

It was decided a levy was still viable - the message had to be clarified and voters had to be educated as to the direct value to them of a "yes" vote. In addition, the City of Dayton was asked to take a more active role in educating city residents regarding benefits, since the levy proposal included a commitment by the park district (MetroParks) to take on responsibility for and enhancement of several city parks. The new slogan became "Clean, Safe Parks...Today and Tomorrow." On November 8, 1994, the levy passed.

"This (1994 levy) issue will improve our river corridors and link green space and communities making a tapestry of green for our community for the first time in history. But it involves so much more. The 'Parks 2000' program is a parks blueprint for the future that will ensure safe, clean parks." - Jean V. Woodhull

SEVERAL PARKS ADDED

With community support and the additional funding provided by the 1994 levy, on January 1, 1995, through agreements with the City of Dayton and Miami Conservancy District, the Park District (MetroParks) added Island Park, Van Cleve Park, Deeds Point, Wesleyan Nature Center, Sunrise Park, Wegerzyn Horticultural Center and river corridor areas to its facilities to provide daily management, programming and security.

NAME CHANGED TO FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

1995 was also the year to solve a problem that had plagued the park district (MetroParks) for many

years. There was considerable confusion created by its name, Montgomery County Park District (followed by Dayton-Montgomery County Park District and finally Park District of Dayton-Montgomery County). The name led residents to believe the park district was part of the City of Dayton or Montgomery County government structure. Few knew which parks fell under park district management and that the park district was in fact a separate political subdivision of the State of Ohio.

After considerable research and community input, the Board of Park Commissioners requested approval from the Montgomery County Probate Court for a name change to Five Rivers MetroParks. The new name was approved on July 20, 1995. It was selected to eliminate confusion and better reflect the direction of the agency. "Five Rivers" relates to the five waterways (Great Miami River, Stillwater River, Mad River, Twin Creek and Wolf Creek) in Montgomery County and the importance of river corridors. "MetroParks" was coined to designate the region-wide services provided.

KAREN DAVIS JOINED THE BOARD

On March 29, 1996, Jeff Leland retired from the Board of Park Commissioners and Karen L. Davis was appointed to fill the position.

"Recreation is a vital part of a community's health. Parks and recreation provide opportunities for a healthy mind and body, and it's available for free, right in our own backyard." - Karen L. Davis

IRVIN BIESER BECAME A BOARD MEMBER

The next change in the board came in 1998. After serving ten years as a MetroParks commissioner, Jean Woodhull resigned from the Board of Park Commissioners on November 20, 1998, and Irvin G. Bieser, Jr. was appointed to fill the position. "Jean Woodhull's leadership has been significant," commented Marvin Olinsky. "Her public sense of responsibility and commitment to the outdoors has been felt throughout the Dayton/Montgomery County area."

PARKS 21: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The nineties were a period of considerable growth. MetroParks grew in acreage, staff and services, as well as developed a broader direction to accomplish its mission.

1999 was an important year for MetroParks, a time to assess what had been accomplished and where MetroParks was headed. MetroParks staff evaluated the progress made towards fulfilling the commitments of "Parks 2000" and looked to the future, developing a 10-year plan that became known as "Parks 21." Key elements of the plan called for park improvements, additional law enforcement and maintenance staff, extended recreation trails, revitalization of Dayton's riverfront through management of RiverScape and additional acreage for conservation. With many of the "Parks 2000" plans completed or nearing completion and new opportunities to respond to the future needs of Montgomery County citizens at hand, the Board of Park Commissioners determined it was time to return to the voters and request a new levy to replace the 1994 levy. It was clear additional funding would be needed to implement "Parks 21."

"PARKS 21" LEVY PASSED

The Five Rivers MetroParks Levy Committee was formed with Richard E. Gump as treasurer. The slogan "Our Parks...Our Future!" was adopted. A massive education effort regarding the "Parks 21" proposal was launched. On November 7, 2000, the citizens of Montgomery showed overwhelming support of "Parks 21" by passing a new \$1.8 mil, 10-year levy (to replace the \$1.2 mil levy) with a 65% vote in favor of the levy.

RIVERSCAPE GRAND OPENING

Funding was now in place to move forward with programming and maintenance of RiverScape. A grand opening for RiverScape was held on May 19, 2001 with speeches, activities, music and the first public viewing of the Five Rivers Fountain and a Laser, Light and Music show. Attendance at the event was estimated at 50,000 or more — the largest event attendance in downtown Dayton anyone could remember.

PROTECTING ADDITIONAL LAND

Conservation opportunities also immediately presented themselves. By June 2001, 300 acres of scenic land were purchased and an additional 250 acres protected through conservation easements in the Twin Creek Valley northwest of Germantown MetroPark and south of Twin Creek MetroPark. Attention was

also focused on the Stillwater river corridor with MetroParks striving to protect undeveloped stretches between Englewood and Wegerzyn Gardens MetroParks.

"To protect the natural resources of our community, we must begin to work within the urban fabric. We must create a healthy city so people will want to live within the city and not destroy green space through urban sprawl." - Marvin Olinsky (October 1997)

MARVIN OLINSKY CONTRIBUTIONS

With successful passage of the levy and a blueprint for the future of MetroParks in place, Marvin Olinsky announced his retirement effective June 30, 2001.

Under the direction of Marvin Olinsky (1987-2001), MetroParks had made inroads into new areas and established a foundation for its role in the next century through the "Parks 2000" and "Parks 21" plans. Emphasis was placed on greenways and river corridors that link natural resources, public areas and communities through linear parks and multi-use paths. Research pointed to the importance of these corridors not only for recreation but for their value to wildlife as pathways between potentially isolated natural areas. With the support of Montgomery County residents, MetroParks took a leadership role in the development and management of linear parks through partnerships with cities, townships and municipalities. In addition, emphasis was placed on the importance of rivers and riverfront recreation and utilization, as well as on the need for increased service to urban areas to assure the entire population - urban, suburban and rural - was served. All this was accomplished while continuing to focus on the important issues of conservation, maintenance, improvements and security at MetroParks facilities assuring "clean, safe parks...today and tomorrow."

As of June 30, 2001, MetroParks had increased to 23 facilities totaling more than 11,500 acres.

"Our fifth river, Twin Creek, is a very special stream. One can easily see the bottom, even in pools 5 to 6 feet deep. The abundance of fish life is astounding. It is a sparkling gem highly deserving of protection." - Irvin G. Bieser, Jr. (October 1999)

21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND

CHARLES SHOEMAKER - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With Olinsky's retirement, the Board of Park Commissioners appointed Charles Shoemaker, who had been with MetroParks since June, 1977 (most recently as chief operations director), as MetroParks new executive director. During his years with MetroParks, Shoemaker had developed an in-depth knowledge of MetroParks, especially in the areas of finance, operations and land protection, and was well prepared for his new role. Protection of natural resources and land stewardship continued to be a priority. By February 2003, MetroParks was responsible for 11,787 acres and offered 24 facilities for public enjoyment.

Under the direction of Shoemaker (2001-2011), emphasis was placed on developing active outdoor recreation amenities and strengthening the agency's position as a conservation leader. In addition to making important land acquisitions for connecting regional bikeways, a new initiative called "Five Rivers Outdoors" was launched in 2005 striving to put Dayton on the map as a place to kayak, backpack, fly fish and mountain bike. Recreation programming was expanded and new facilities opened, such as the MetroParks Mountain Biking Area (MoMBA) in 2007 and the long distance Twin Valley Trail (TVT) in 2008. Clean Ohio Funds were leveraged to protect lands important to the region's natural heritage, expanding the agency's conservation areas to 11, in addition to the 19 parks in operation. As of 2011, MetroParks had increased protected land to 15,450 acres — a 34% increase under Shoemaker's watch.

"We hold in public trust some of the most sensitive natural areas in this region. As we move forward, we will widen the awareness of land stewardship and continually educate ourselves as well on how best to manage these areas for their ultimate protection. This is paramount, and the public expects no less." - Charles Shoemaker (February 2003)

ALAN PIPPENGER BECAME A BOARD MEMBER

In 2005, after serving 21 years as a MetroParks commissioner, Robert Siebenthaler stepped down from the Board of Park Commissioners and Alan Pippenger was appointed to fill the position. Pippenger, a life-long Daytonian, community leader and president of a fifth generation family business, brings a strong business approach to the board.

"Bob Siebenthaler has been an integral part of the agency's growth and a steadfast supporter of our mission." - Charles Shoemaker (December 2004)

SECURING OUR FUTURE, REBECCA BENNÁ

In November of 2009, voters asked to support Five Rivers MetroParks for the first time in a decade gave a resounding stamp of approval to a 10-year replacement levy. However, these were tough financial times for all public agencies and the years ahead would prove to be challenging for Five Rivers MetroParks as well. With Charlie Shoemaker's retirement, the Board of Park Commissioners appointed Rebecca Benná as Executive Director on March 1, 2011. Benná, came to MetroParks by way of the City of Glendale (Arizona) where she served as the Parks and Recreation Director. A native Ohioan, she had also served as a former director of the Miamisburg Parks and Recreation Department and was familiar with organization's outstanding legacy.

During her first few years at MetroParks, Benná shared in the celebration of the agency's 50-year history in the community, but also faced millions of dollars of funding cuts created by eroding property tax revenues and state funding changes. Through diversifying the agency's revenue streams and working to achieve operational savings, Benná continues to steer the organization to become more balanced and sustainable in its finances. She also led the organization through the development of a strategic plan that will guide Five Rivers MetroParks through 2018 and position it for a sustainable future, as well as a 10-year comprehensive master plan designed to ensure Five Rivers MetroParks' resources are aligned with current and future trends, community values, and the Montgomery County region's changing demographics.

PURSUING THE MISSION - VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

Over the years, a major force in the development of MetroParks has been the hard work of volunteers. Donald Schmidt credited this involvement during his period as director with making it possible to increase attendance in the parks without increasing staff. He points out, "Volunteers provided expertise that could not be hired." MetroParks commissioners, past and present, recognize the invaluable contributions volunteers have made. Ruth Mead notes, "Volunteers communicate the mission of MetroParks to the public as well as work in the parks. Cox Arboretum has won awards for its volunteer program. Every MetroPark has its cadre of volunteers." Siebenthaler believed, "Volunteers have enhanced the quality of life in our area. Dayton is unique in the willingness of volunteers to contribute." Harry Price points with satisfaction to the fact that, "Volunteers feel a sense of ownership, which is good, because they do own it." As MetroParks moves forward with "Parks 21" and its vision for the 21st century, volunteers continue to play a crucial role with expanded opportunities and services planned.

CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP

Protecting open space and natural areas always has been a priority for Five Rivers MetroParks. Dane Mutter, the Assistant Director under Don Schmidt, had a background in wildlife management and

realized that the natural park lands needed to be actively managed if they were to maintain a diversity of plant and animal life. He established the land stewardship program, and made caring for the natural lands an agency priority. Since establishing the land management policy in 1981, the agency had committed to maintaining 80% of its lands in a natural state to protect diversity of habitat.

In June 2010, the board approved a new more stringent policy that commits MetroParks to maintain 90% of managed land as natural area, and gives guidelines on how to keep this commitment. Meanwhile, a green bug from Asia began eating its way through North American forests. By 2011, the Emerald Ash Borer was found throughout the MetroPark forests. Considering that 70% of MetroParks lands are forested and 30% of those forests are ash trees, the park district faced a huge battle in trying to save the forests. In the fall of 2011 a major reforestation initiative was begun involving the public in the process through nut collection, tree planting and seedling care.

When Dane Mutter retired in 1988 after 21 years at MetroParks, he handed the reigns of land stewardship over to Dave Nolin. Nolin had been hired as a wildlife research intern in 1981 then moved on to habitat management before becoming responsible for land acquisition and management of natural areas in 1992. In 2015, Nolin retired leaving a legacy of nearly 16,000 acres of protected prairies, wetlands and forests in the Miami Valley.

"Dave Nolin truly led Five Rivers in its conservation initiatives in a manner that has helped establish MetroParks as an innovator and leader locally, statewide and nationally." - Charles Shoemaker (September 2012)

THE FUTURE OF FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

Those who have been involved in the beginnings and operations of MetroParks over the years are enthusiastically optimistic as they look to the future. They are also confidently proud of what they have accomplished. Staff, commissioners and volunteers eagerly anticipate the important role MetroParks will play in the region in the 21st century and beyond.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

- **Apr. 8, 1963** — Montgomery County Park District, now known as Five Rivers MetroParks, was created
- **Apr. 1963** — William P. Patterson, Charles S. Bridge and Harry S. Price, Jr. appointed to Board of Park Commissioners
- **Jun. 18, 1963** — Board of Park Commissioners' held first meeting
- **Mar. 2, 1964** — J. Richard Lawwill hired as first director-secretary
- **Nov. 1964** — the first levy attempt failed to pass
- **Apr. 1965** — park district purchased first acres at Drylick Run (now Carriage Hill MetroPark) — 223 acres purchased — and at Englewood MetroPark — 29 acres purchased
- **May 1965** — \$0.3 million, 10-year levy passed
- **Feb. 1966** — beginning of Possum Creek MetroPark — 275 acres purchased
- **May 25, 1966** — beginning of Sugarcreek MetroPark — 540 acres purchased
- **Feb. 1967** — lands at Englewood, Huffman, Germantown and Taylorsville MetroParks leased on flood lands held by the Miami Conservancy District
- **1968** — Carriage Hill Farm became part of park district through purchase
- **1970** — Simon Burick named park commissioner succeeding Charles Bridge
- **Dec. 1972** — Cox Arboretum joined MetroParks
- **Nov. 1974** — \$0.3 million renewal and \$0.2 million additional levy passed
- **Aug. 1976** — Donald P. Schmidt named director-secretary with retirement of J. Richard Lawwill
- **1977** — Aullwood Garden donated to MetroParks
- **1981** — Ruth C. Mead named park commissioner succeeding William Patterson
- **Aug. 20, 1981** — Land management (land stewardship) program approved by board to guide the long range protection of natural areas for diversity of habitat
- **1984** — Robert K. Siebenthaler named park commissioner succeeding Simon Burick
- **May 8, 1984** — \$0.5 million levy renewal passed
- **1985** — Leland Center purchased as MetroParks' headquarters
- **Dec. 1, 1986** - Marvin Olinsky named director-secretary with retirement of Donald Schmidt
- **May 3, 1988** — \$0.7 million, 10-year levy passed
- **1988** — Established Ohio's first prairie nursery program in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Transportation
- **1989** — Jean V. Woodhull named park commissioner succeeding Ruth Mead
- **Apr. 1, 1990** — Eastwood Park leased to MetroParks by City of Dayton
- **1990** — Jeff Leland named park commissioner succeeding Harry Price
- **Apr. 1, 1992** — Eastwood Lake leased to MetroParks by City of Dayton
- **May 3, 1994** — \$1.2 million, 10-year levy failed to pass

- **Nov. 8, 1994** — \$1.2 million, 10-year levy passed (1988 levy canceled)
- **1995** — park district opened first bike trail to public at Wolf Creek Rail Trail on abandoned rail corridor
- **Jan. 1, 1995** — management and programming of Island, Van Cleve, Deeds and Sunrise Parks; Wegerzyn Horticultural Center; Wesleyan Nature Center; and river corridor properties transferred to MetroParks from City of Dayton and Miami Conservancy District
- **Jul. 20, 1995** — Name changed to Five Rivers MetroParks
- **1996** — Karen L. Davis named park commissioner succeeding Jeff Leland
- **Jun. 8, 1997** — renovations at Island MetroPark completed and park rededicated
- **1997** — Twin Creek opened as a MetroPark
- **1998** — Irvin G. Bieser Jr. named park commissioner succeeding Jean Woodhull
- **Jan, 1999** — Hills & Dales became part of MetroParks through lease with City of Dayton
- **Aug. 18, 1999** — groundbreaking at Van Cleve MetroPark for RiverScape development
- **Sept. 17, 1999** — Marvin Olinsky named chief executive officer
- **Summer 2000** — The Creekside Recreation Trail, which connected Montgomery County trails to the Greene County system, was dedicated
- **Oct. 16, 2000** — Adventure Central at Wesleyan MetroPark opened
- **Nov. 7, 2000** — \$1.8 million, 10-year levy passed (1994 levy canceled)
- **May 19, 2001** — RiverScape MetroPark grand opening held at former Van Cleve Park
- **Jun. 30, 2001** — Charles Shoemaker named executive director with retirement of Marvin Olinsky
- **Nov. 2001** — 2nd Street Market opened in its permanent home
- **Jul. 2002** — FRMP acquires 86 acres along the Stillwater River with Clean Ohio Funds; this was the largest undeveloped stretch of the Stillwater River left in Montgomery County. The area is named Shiloh Woods Conservation Area
- **Aug. 8, 2002** — District broke ground on improvements to Deeds Point MetroPark, at the confluence of the Great Miami and Mad rivers at the northern edge of downtown, in preparation for hosting Inventing Flight, the region's celebration of the 100th anniversary of powered flight held in 2003
- **Sept. 2002** — Stillwater Bikeway construction completed, connecting Jake Grossnickle Memorial Park to the MetroParks paths within Englewood MetroPark
- **Dec. 17, 2002** — Huffman interpretive center was dedicated and reopened, recognizing the importance of Huffman Prairie as one of the state's largest prairie remnants
- **Nov. 11, 2003** — Zorniger Education campus opened at Cox Arboretum MetroPark
- **May 20, 2006** — Children's Discovery Garden at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark unveiled to public
- **Jan. 1, 2005** — Robert K. Siebenthaler retired from board, replaced by Alan Pippenger

- **Aug. 2005** — MetroParks announced it will begin an ambitious effort to develop outdoor adventure as a regional signature piece called “Five Rivers Outdoors” with Greg Brumitt appointed Five Rivers Outdoors program manager
- **Jan. 2007** — Five Rivers MetroParks and the Three Valley Conservation Trust negotiated conservation easements covering 1,100 acres near upper Twin Creek in Montgomery and Preble counties; the purchases signified the largest single run of conservation land buys since 1966
- **Sept. 15, 2007** — MetroParks Mountain Biking Area (MoMBA) opened to public
- **Jun. 21, 2008** — grand opening of the Twin Valley Backpacking Trail (TVT)
- **Jan. 1, 2009** — Webster Station Development Group transferred management of the 2nd Street Market to Five Rivers MetroParks
- **Jun. 20, 2009** — Grand opening of the restored Hills & Dales MetroPark
- **Fall 2009** — work completed on the removal of the dangerous low-water dam on Stillwater River at Englewood MetroPark, returning river to natural state
- **Fall 2009** — Strategic Trail Initiative launched to make nature trails more usable and manageable through improved design and installation
- **Nov. 3, 2009** — Voters asked to support Five Rivers MetroParks for the first time in a decade approved a 10-year replacement levy. 71 percent in favor to 29 percent against; passage of Issue 4, the replacement levy of 1.8 mills, should generated a maximum of \$17.9 million annually
- **2010** — MetroParks leveraged Clean Ohio Funds with local dollars to protect 621 acres of land, including much of the Shiloh Woods, Woodman Fen, Medlar and Needmore Conservation Areas
- **Jun. 2010** — Board approved a new policy that commite Five Rivers MetroParks to maintain 90% of managed land as natural area and gave guidelines on how to keep this commitment
- **Jun. 28, 2010** — Phase III of RiverScape MetroPark opened, including a 17,000-square-foot pavilion and a 9,600-square-foot ice rink; the complex also included a 5,000-square-foot bike hub; as Dayton became the only city east of the Mississippi River to have a fully functional commuter bike hub
- **Dec. 2010** — MetroParks used Clean Ohio Funds to purchase 115 acres — establishing a 416-acre tract called Medlar Conservation Area, established to protect mature woodlands, deep ravines, hilltops offering scenic vistas, a Civil War-era farm house and remnants of the Miami-Erie Canal in the rapidly developing area of the Austin Pike Interchange on Interstate 75
- **Feb 2011** — Wetland Mitigation bank approved to start issuing credits; Five Rivers MetroParks was the first conservation agency in Ohio to own, design and manage a mitigation bank, the first of its kind in southwest Ohio
- **Feb. 28, 2011** — executive director Charles Shoemaker retired after nearly 34 years with MetroParks
- **Mar. 1, 2011** — Rebecca Benna appointed as new executive director
- **Jul. 10, 2011** — Woodman Fen Conservation Area, an ancient wetland that dates to the last Ice Age 13,000 years ago, opened after extensive restoration by Five Rivers MetroParks

- **Aug. 12, 2011** — grand opening of the 2.5-mile Great Miami Bikeway connector, linking Taylorsville MetroPark to Tipp City's Kyle Park.
- **Fall 2011** — work began on a massive reforestation effort within the MetroParks to combat the damage caused by invasive species, such as the Emerald Ash Borer
- **Apr., 2012** — New Five Rivers MetroParks headquarters opened at 409 E. Monument Ave.
- **Oct. 12, 2012** — grand opening of the Cox Arboretum Tree Tower, part of the Arboretum's master plan designed to help visitors connect with nature
- **Oct. 25, 2012** — River Run sponsors announced they have exceeded the fundraising goal of \$4 million to build the RiverScape River Run project
- **Apr. 8, 2013** — Five Rivers MetroParks celebrates 50th anniversary
- **Oct. 2013** — Medlar Bikeway opened connecting Great Miami River with Austin Landing area
- **May 5, 2014** — grand opening of Mad River Run at Eastwood MetroPark
- **Mar. 2015** — MetroParks launched 10-Year comprehensive master plan process
- **Spring 2015** — Five Rivers MetroParks Foundation established to ensure a healthier financial future for the region's parks, forests and waterways
- **Mar. 2016** — 10-Year comprehensive master plan adopted and unveiled to public

PEOPLE

The following people have served in these various roles:

PROBATE JUDGE

Former: Neal F. Zimmers, George J. Gournaris

Current: Alice O. McCollum

COMMISSIONERS

Charter: Harry S. Price, Jr., William P. Patterson, Charles S. Bridge

Former: Simon Burick, Ruth C. Mead, Jeff Leland, Jean V. Woodhull, Robert K. Siebenthaler, Irvin G. Bieser Jr., Alan F. Pippenger

Current: Karen L. Davis, William A. (Bear) Monita, Jessica Saunders

DIRECTOR-SECRETARY/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Former: J. Richard Lawwill, Donald P. Schmidt, Marvin Olinsky, Charles Shoemaker

Current: Rebecca A. “Becky” Benná

LEGAL COUNSEL

Robert M. Curry

10/16/2019