

FRIENDS OF THE PARKS

(An abridged history)
1989 — 2011

"Friends of the Parks" owes its existence to the contributions of supporters of the successful 1988 county parks tax levy, to a \$4,000 grant from the Edward F. Knight Family Fund through the Toledo Community Foundation, and to the enthusiastic support of people determined to improve the Wood County park system. **On July 20, 1989**, a skeleton group of citizens began drawing up by-laws.

The first membership campaign in 1990 resulted in 176 members and \$1,800 in non-renewable life and matching corporate membership income which was used to establish a fund for future Park District projects. During the year the format of quarterly membership meetings, a newsletter, and an Annual Meeting was established, as was the mission of providing volunteer assistance for the parks staff at county-wide events.

In the eleven years since, membership has grown steadily to 700 members, the Board of Trustees has been enlarged from 9 to 18 members, and many new projects have been tackled by the Friends.

Fundraising for the Slippery Elm Trail Project, which turned a 13-mile former railroad bed into a walking and cycling trail, began in 1991. The trail was opened in the fall of 1995.

In 1992, the Friends established a separate holding fund for contributions for the Zimmerman School Foundation.

To facilitate ways for the public to contribute to the county parks' resources, the Friends published the "Giving Catalog" in 1996. A lending library, established at Park District headquarters in 1991, is another beneficiary of public donations and memorials.

FOTP aided in the park district's development of the W.W. Knight Nature Preserve in Perrysburg Township, serving as a conduit for a \$15,000 contribution from the Knight Foundation for developing a prairie there. The preserve was opened to the public in 1997.

Contributions from the Friends have enhanced the county park system by funding the Butterfly and

Heirloom Garden at park headquarters, purchasing a new podium and public address system for the Stone Hall at Otsego Park, donating kitchen materials for use at the Otsego teas and by publicizing the park district's annual progress in local papers.

The year 1998 was a pivotal one for the FOTP. The Friends drew on the resources of many of its members to help pass the 1998 park district levy, ensuring that the county parks system will continue its outstanding work for the next ten years. In addition to funding the levy effort, FOTP members assembled and distributed yard signs, solicited levy endorsements and conducted a countywide door-to-door campaign. FOTP continues to maintain the levy fund for the 2008 campaign.

To ensure continued success for the FOTP, President Mike Godfrey lead the Friends in developing a strategic plan which set the group's goals for the future.

In 1998, a Kowa spotting scope was purchased by the FOTP. It is used by naturalists for photography and field observation, as well as for public viewing of waterfowl in the Marlow River Overlook Room at Otsego Park on the Maumee.

1999 began with icy roads that caused the cancellation of the January annual meeting! It was another busy year: members of the FOTP held successful flower and seed sale fundraisers, volunteered at the Otsego Park teas and other events. Helmets for riders on the Trail and small binoculars for school groups were purchased. The Giving Catalogue was updated.

In a very important project, a hard-working group of trustees and interested friends with the aid of a facilitator completed a strategic plan for the FOTP. Our mission has been restated; and provisions for a continual update assure that there will be future aims and goals for our support of the Wood County Park District.

In 2000 Kathy Mills created two FOTP web pages on WCNet and Neighborhoodlink/BG. A volunteer questionnaire mailed to the membership

yielded 110 volunteers entered into a database for quick reference for FOTP and park staff. The FOTP brochure was updated by David Stratso. Two bikes were purchased for Rangers' use on Slippery Elm Trail.

FOTP honored two people who left the Wood County Parks, Andrew Kalmar with a bench on Slippery Elm Trail, and Chris Gajewicz with a picture of President McKinley in Zimmerman School.

2001 brought us office space at Headquarters, a new filing cabinet and a computer. We were grateful to Neil Munger for finding the space

We were saddened at the death of Lyle Fletcher, but created a memorial at the Fletcher Arboretum at the Wood County Historical Museum. Tree identification signs and a brochure for self-guided tours were created, thanks to Dr. Earl Campbell and Chris Gajewicz. The Friends of the Parks Fund within the Bowling Green Community Foundation was established in April. We had more visibility at the Wood County and Pemberville Fairs through a display board and membership information brochures. The Centennial Celebration of Carter-Loomis Farm provided an opportunity to serve refreshments, as we also did at the opening of Bradner Preserve.

In 2002, the **FWCP** made two major donations to the park district. One enabled the rangers to purchase an all-terrain-vehicle for more effective patrolling of the Slippery Elm Trail. It has also been used widely throughout the Park district and as a public relations tool at fairs and parades. The other donation helped to update computer communications district wide. This will also help the Friends improve organization of its data, with the intention of better serving our general membership. The volunteer questionnaire continues to be a valuable tool in coordinating volunteers, and the strategic plan, an ongoing process, keeps us well focused.

The Friends sponsored the first Board/Parks Staff picnic. It was a wonderful way to enhance the working relationship between the two groups and will be an annual event.

In order to clear up confusion, our original initials, FOTP, were changed this year to specifically indicate that we are a group supporting the Wood County Parks.

This was a year when the last of the founding

members left the board. It was the dedication and support of those original Friends that helped set in motion the development of the parks system that we all enjoy today. Those of us who are picking up the reins seek to carry on in a way that will honor their original vision.

We began 2003 by honoring Marge Hunter, the last of the original founding members to leave the board. We also were privileged to nominate Martha and Dick Kudner for the Spirit of Wood County award which they received in July. The Wood County Parks would not exist today were it not for their energy and vision

This year 2004, we worked to operate more efficiently to better serve the parks. We purchased new software for the membership database which, I am happy to report, is working well. All committee responsibilities were clearly defined and will be reviewed and updated annually. As we move into next year, we will be looking to more non-board members to assist the chairpersons of some committees. Happily, the result was improved returns. We shall continue to view these projects critically for maximum results.

Completing most of its strategic planning projects for 2004, while funding for charitable and community support organizations throughout the nation was minimal to diminishing, FWCP stayed on course and fulfilled most of their plans for the year.

The finance and audit committee implemented a budget for the first time, allowing a month-to-month monitoring of funds and their balances. This in turn saw us able to purchase the computer hardware and Power Point software for the Parks Board and Friends promotional and educational presentations. Donations continued for gifts and memorials to the Knight Center. In addition, the FWCP committed to fund the water feature in the "Window on Nature." The spring flower sale was combined into one site at the Agricultural Incubation

Included in the festivities surrounding the dedicated and grand opening of the W. W. Knight Nature Center, the Friends of the Wood County Parks funded the front landscaping and organized and encouraged donations to help with the overall project.

In 2005 new committee chairs took the reigns of important committees. Nancy Perry became the hospitality chair and fall sale chair bringing

continued tasty meals and successful sales. Lee Gagle has done a fantastic job of totally renovating the FWCP web site with many valuable links, pictures of recent events, downloadable registration and membership forms, and posting of minutes and other important information for members. Jan Martell has taken over from Terri Hansen as program chair and has compiled a list of exciting people to entertain and inform at future general membership meetings.

FWCP set a new course with the inception of the Earth Day Wine, Food and Art Gala as an additional, if not primary fund raiser. Joanie Foster jumped into this with Judy Westmeyer and, with the enthusiastic help of numerous other FWCP trustees, have organized what promises to be a signal event on the first anniversary of the Knight Nature Center: 22 April 2006. Hopefully our experience with this year's event will set the pace for future fund-raising efforts.

A minimum of \$24,000 is needed to help build a new greenhouse for the plant propagation program of the District led by Chris Smalley. This goal became imperative late in 2005 as the Park District chose to end our use of the Agricultural Incubation Center's facility due to increased and prohibitive rents. Hopefully the FWCP initiative to provide a new greenhouse on the newly-acquired Reuthinger property in Lake Township will quickly fill the void to re-establish a historically popular and necessary program to the Park District Center on SR. 582. The fall seed and bulb sale, also consolidated to one location at the Parks District Headquarters, came off with hardly a glitch. Both sales' net gains were a bit behind the previous year.

The FWCP trustees closed the year by incorporation a three-year project in its 2005 Strategic Plan to fund and build a greenhouse on the Park District Headquarters property to help establish our own propagation and stocking programs free of the ever more restrictive facilities currently used.

The year 2006 centered on fund raising to fulfill our pledge to raise \$24,000 to fund a new greenhouse. The main source of funds came from the Wine Cheese and Art for the Parks Gala. Over \$16,000 has been raised for the greenhouse this year giving us a total of over \$22,000 to date. We will continue to raise funds for this and additional programs in the future.

The goals set forth in the strategic plan for 2006 have been met. We have increased our visibility in the community and will continue to be a source of aid to the Parks.

The 2007 year began with a well-attended annual meeting and a welcome to new trustees Mary Gwin, Chuck Hayden, Scott Kisabeth, and Anne Zachman.

Discussions of fund raising projects began early in the year. We decided early that a large fund raiser, such as another wine and cheese party, was impractical due to the amount of time and volunteers that would be needed for the levy campaign in March 2008. Therefore, the Spring and Fall sales were our main fund raising events.

At our Board of Trustees meeting Martha and Dick Kudner spoke to us about the 1988 and 1998 levy campaigns. Their discussion was a great help as we learned a lot of "do's" and "don'ts" to start the planning of the 2008 campaign. At this meeting the initial planning committee was formed .

As the year progressed we were saddened by the death of Anne Zachman, a Board of trustees member, who had been active in the Friends of the Wood County Parks since it's beginning. It was decided to begin a memorial fund to buy a bench at the W. W. Knight Preserve in her honor.

The Wood County Fair Parks tent was a great success with record attendance. The Friends Volunteers worked alongside the staff to help make this a great attraction for fair goers.

The greenhouse finally became a reality when the structure was erected in the Fall of this year. We also voted to donate \$2,000 to purchase equipment for the greenhouse.

As the year ends, we are all working to support the campaign for the March 2008 parks levy.

2008 began with snow, ice and anticipation. Armed with \$20,000 PAC funds gleaned by FWCP from fundraising activities, a cadre of volunteers put yard signs out in inclement weather, devoted hours to logistics and sent letters to the editor, the Levy committee set out to focus support for the March Levy. No one knew the odds of success in the face of an increasingly troubled economy. Joyce Kepke and Earl Campbell headed the levy committee with the unfailing support of Neil Munger, Wood County Park Director, and the Park staff which donated considerable personal time. Dave Stratso was the treasurer of the committee and the efforts of the

advance planning committee were invaluable. Wood County Residents responded in a resoundingly positive manner at the poles and assured major funding for Wood County Parks for the next decade.

FWCP continued with the traditional schedule of fundraising with the annual spring flower sale and autumn birdseed and bulb sales with Mickey Kolva spearheading the management and logistics. Scott Kisabeth designed and constructed the birdhouses for both spring and fall events. In June the FWCP board prepared the annual summer luncheon with the Wood Co park staff members which is arranged to show gratitude and enhance communication. In August FWCP volunteers were greeters and guides at the Wood County Parks display tent at the Wood County and Pemberville Fairs.

Communications continued to evolve through the efforts of FWCP newsletter editor, Joyce Kepke and our web master, Lee Gagle. The general membership meetings were well intended. In February Dick Bostdorff presented a slide collage from his nature photo collection entitled "Who's Looking at You". The May meeting topic, "Local Amphibians and Reptiles" was presented by Kent Bekker, Toledo Zoo Herpetologist and was complete with a snake which could be handled. Dan Woodward, Education Specialist, presented an attention arresting "History of Fort Meigs"

In consultation with Neil Munger, FWCP launched a new project to support the Wood County Parks educational objectives. The educational and small group meeting capabilities at the Knight preserve, at times used to capacity, needs expansion. The unfinished second floor of the Knight Preserve Building has ideal potential space for class room and medium to small group use. FWCP intends to offer financial support for this important project over the next 3 years. At this writing the details are under consideration.

Without the significant and generous dedication of time of FWCP board members, committee chairs and its membership, the mission goals of FWCP could not have been accomplished in 2008.

2009 in review: We began with a successful Eat-Out fundraiser at Max & Erma's restaurant in Perrysburg, in which 20% of the sales from participating patron's to go to the FWCP.

A memorial plaque was designed and hung at

the W.W. Night Center to honor long time supporter Anne Zachman. The names of future memorials under \$500 designated for educational purposes will be added to a plaque located there.

The Robert Coon memorial fund purchased a drinking fountain at the W.W. Night Preserve. That drinking fountain also is equipped with a pet fountain.

At the May General Membership meeting the program presented by Dr. Earl Campbell on an Energy Independent Nation was an eye opener to geothermal energy.

The Spring Flower and Native plant sale continued the FWCP fundraising efforts; while patrons beautified and restored native plants in their yards.

Volunteers handed out pencils and provided information at the Wood County and Pemberville Fairs about FWCP membership and its benefits.

Volunteers provided refreshments for the 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Wood County Parks.

In September, \$18,000 dollars was provided by the FWCP to finish the 2nd floor education and meeting room at the W.W. Knight Preserve. Everyone should take time and see the area with the limitless possibilities for the Parks and their Patrons.

The October General membership meeting had a wonderful presentation on the History of the Maumee River presented by Fred Folger; with a follow-up presentation about the history of the Maumee today. What a great compilation of information and photographs!

The Fall Bird seed and Bulb Sale in October was another staple fundraising program with the addition of ready-made bird or bat houses for purchase and encouraging people to build their own with plans available at the Park Head Quarters Bird House Display.

Plans are in their final stages for March 2010 when several fundraising opportunities are scheduled, which include eating at Max & Erma's in Perrysburg and Bob Evans and Easy Street restaurants in Bowling Green. Thank to Joan Jaffray for spearheading this project.

Volunteers are an important part of any organization. President Kisabeth thanks everyone who has volunteered his or her time to the Friends of Wood County Parks.

2010 events: A recap of the events over the last 12 months.

In April, the Friends of Wood County Parks held "Breakfast at the Greenhouse" with general public and friends of the parks able to enjoy a continental breakfast, and tour the greenhouse to see seedlings and plants. The warm inside temperature of the greenhouse and the friendly Wood County Parks staff make it possible for hardy plants to be available for our spring public sale and for park planting; perhaps even your own yard flourished with native plants from the sale.

With the generosity and support of the Friends at the dine-out, fundraisers at the local Bob Evans, Easy Street, and Max & Erma's restaurants, we were able to provide funding to replace the greenhouse Roof.

The friends also generously funded "Jazz in the Wild" event held in August at the W.W. Knight Nature Preserve. What a beautiful evening with music and refreshments, sitting on the deck, and watching the spectacular sunset!

The ever popular Fall Bulb and Bird Seed Sale and the addition of whimsical concrete sculptures from the Carruth Studio fundraiser provided additional funds to add permanent sound systems to the stone hall in Otsego Park and the W.W. Knight Nature Preserve. The new sound systems will enhance the enjoyment of Park and Membership meetings and increase revenues from outside room rentals.

2011 Report: At the February General Membership meeting new trustees joined the board and have been doing a great job. The new trustees for this past year are Robert Huber, Fiona MacKinnon, Dorinda Shelley, and Joanie Foster

At the meeting people heard a fascinating informative program on Owl pellets given by Joanne Roehrs. Joanne has a Master's Degree and teaches Ecology, Biology, Botany and Zoology at Owens Community College. Her presentation covered various aspects of Owl excrement and how the contents of the pellets show what the birds are eating from their habitat. Everyone had an up-close chance to rummage through them.

In March, the Wood County Park Board approved the naming of the upstairs room at the W.W. Knight Nature Center as the "Friends Green Room." For those who don't remember, when the Nature center was first built in 2004 that area was a

large, unfinished room that was occasionally used as an informal instruction & meeting room. Through your contributions, the Friends donated \$18,000 in 2009 to complete the renovation. We are proud to use this space as a functionally, well designed education and meeting area that includes handicap accessible restrooms.

In early spring, the FWCP started a special fund that was established with proceeds from the first ever Wood County Parks Garage Sale masterminded by Deb Nofzinger. The fund will provide grants to Wood County Schools for transportation of students to the parks for educational purposes.

In April, Steve Wilhelm's Boy Scout service project greatly enhanced the boardwalk at W.W. Knight Preserve. Steve's project was the construction of an observation deck with benches along the boardwalk. Steve worked with the park staff through the concept, design and final approval. Upon hearing his presentation, the Friends Board voted to fund his project. As you have the opportunity to walk down the trail enjoying the natural habitat, take a moment to sit and rest on one of the benches or observation deck that Steve and other volunteers constructed. Thank you Steve.

We held three fundraisers this year to support the Wood County Parks. Overall, we raised a total of \$5,132.18. First was the Max and Erma's dine out on April 13th. Then we held the Spring and Native Plants sale in May, and the Fall Bulb and Birdseed sale in October. Many thanks to the Mickey Kolva, Pat Koehler, Scott Kisabeth and Joan Jaffray for their leadership and organization of these fundraisers.

Each year we donate a tree to the Wood County Parks that is given away at the Wood County Fair. The winner's name is drawn at random from a list of everyone visiting the Wood County Park's large display tent. Well over 8,600 people perused the displays at the Wood County Fair and another 1,230 at the Pemberville fair. Not everyone went away empty handed. Fair goers that looked at the Friends display went away with cork cup coasters.

In September we held the first annual Grandparent's Day Event. One of our new members to the FWPC board, Fiona MacKinnon, planted the seed of a Grandparents Day event in March where children and grandparents would

participate in outdoor events together. Deb Nofzinger expanded on the original idea and brought the event to reality. It was Grandfriend's Day in the Park! It was held at the W.W. Knight Preserve on Sunday, September 11th. Many activities were offered. Although the weather did not cooperate, the people in attendance recommended that the program should repeat next year. We are expecting the event to grow each year!

The Sound equipment at Otsego and WW Knight was finally installed and put to use. Everyone in attendance at the October 16th General Membership Meeting at Otsego Park was able to clearly hear the informational program about the Black Swamp's 110 acre conservation and restoration site near Pemberville presented by Dr. Robert Huber; one of our new Trustee members for 2011.

The Friends of Wood County Parks purchased computer software that will be used for membership records and office work. Labels were also purchased labels that Bryan recommended for plants and trees in the Greenhouse & around the Parks. I would like to thank Lee and Lori for their time spent on making a new link to Friend's website through www.wcparks.org for easier access. (*See below for the shortcut.*) What a resourceful tool to help plan your outdoor activities. We also gave out a couple of complimentary Friend memberships in recognition of 50 volunteer hours spent in the parks.

Volunteers are an important part of any organization. I thank everyone who has volunteered his or her time to the WC Parks or the Friends of Wood County Parks. Register with Lori at www.wcparks.org and click on volunteer in the main menu, and keep track of your hours and receive a WC Parks volunteer T-shirt; to show off your accomplishment of hours spent. The Friends purchase the shirts as a small token of saying thank you!

As this year comes to a close we say good-bye to the retiring board members who include Earl Campbell, Gloria Green-Hales, and Scott Kisabeth. We thank them for the numerous hours that have been donated to make the Friends of the Wood County Parks organization a great one!

I look forward to seeing you at Otsego Park Sunday February 19, 2012 @ 1pm for the General

Membership Meeting. There you can vote for the proposed two new board members Ranaye McLaughlin who will be secretary and Jean Frances who will be Public relations coordinator.

The meeting is your opportunity to make topic suggestions on future initiatives you would like presented throughout the year. We have also updated brochures and mailings with a QR code; (Quick Response code) scan it and your smart phone will take you to the Friends website.

The Wood County Park System is a great way to start off the New Year. Explore, discover, and enjoy.