



ParkPeopleNews

Creating Citizen Connections to Our Parks

Park People Winter 2016 Newsletter

Executive Director's View by Jim Goulee

Long before the Calatrava became the iconic symbol for our community, the Mitchell Park Conservatory or Domes as we affectionately call it was the most noteworthy architectural symbol that described Milwaukee as a forward thinking community. Much like the Gateway Arch in St. Louis or the Guggenheim in New York it served as a beacon to tourists and put Milwaukee on the map.



Unfortunately, today it serves as a much different kind of symbol. As Cheri Briscoe, a board member of the Park People, recently stated, "it serves today as the canary in the mine". This is an allusion to caged canaries that miners many years ago would carry down into the mine tunnels with them. If dangerous gases such as carbon monoxide collected in the mine, the gases would kill the canary before killing the miners, thus providing a warning to exit the tunnels immediately.

The Domes, as we are all aware, are in need of significant repair or replacement. Due to years of deferred maintenance and potential obsolescence they bring to light the general state of our parks. Just like the canary analogy, the Domes situation is a harbinger of a much larger problem that has been confronting our policy makers for years: deferred maintenance.

It has been estimated that the amount of deferred maintenance in our Park System is somewhere between 200 and 300 million dollars. How do we, as a community, address this problem?

To think that we can do it through the County's Capital budget is naive. Just yesterday I read of the need to replace the County's Safety Building which too has potentially serious structural deficits. The cost is projected to be 184 million dollars. That is just one of a myriad of deserving and needed capital projects in other County Departments that will continue to push our parks' needs further down the list.

It seems that if we, as a community, truly value our parks a more expedient solution is needed. Is it time for a slight increase in the County Sales and Use tax? In 2008 the voters of Milwaukee County actually expressed their desire to do just that in a non-binding, advisory referendum. We said in clear terms that we valued our parks and were willing to pay more in taxes to keep them the pride of our community.

Unfortunately, our State Legislators did not heed the call and allow us to reinvest in our parks through an increase in the sales tax.

We have a choice. Do we continue to demand that our State Legislators allow us a binding referendum that would enable a sales tax increase for the betterment of our parks, or do we just accept that our parks will

continue to suffer from financial neglect? If we choose option two I guess we could just invest in another canary.

2016 Oak Leaf Discovery Tour Coming Soon

Work is well on its way for the 2016 Oak Leaf Discovery Tour. Look for changes and NEW CHALLENGES in this, the 5th year of the Tour.

We have decided to shake things up a little this year and hopefully make it much more interesting! All the locations will be "Keyword" locations. We are eliminating the stamping stations we have employed for the last four years so all locations will be outside and a little more challenging to find. We also will introduce some new locations that may not be quite as bicycle friendly for getting there. We want to encourage more hikers to join the adventures and bikers to occasionally take a little break from their bikes. Actually, some people may prefer to drive to some of the locations to do their exploring while hiking.



POINTS OF INTEREST will be the focus of our Keywords this year. The Passport pages where you find each keyword entry box will also include a QR code that can be used with a smartphone to whisk you to a web page where you will find a map showing the approximate location of the keyword plus information about some of the history or cultural importance of that site. It will be an opportunity to learn as you explore. For those that don't own a smartphone the Passport will also have the URL of a webpage with links to all of the keyword site pages. Many may find this more appealing if they want to explore from the comfort of their home before heading out to collect keywords. Here is a sample keyword page:

www.parkpeoplemke.org/oldt-Gordon-Park

GPS locations for keywords will also be available, so geocachers can think of the keyword as their "cache".

Also new this year, participants will be able to collect Keywords at our Sponsors' business establishments. We want you to know more about the businesses that are such an important source of support for our Oak Leaf Trails and Parks.

The Oak Leaf Tour will start on May 1 and run through early October.

Distribution of the 2016 Passports will begin on April 8th coinciding with the Wheel and Sprocket Bike Expo. The Park People thanks Wheel and Sprocket for their continued support in their design and printing our popular Oak Leaf Discovery Tour Passport. Milwaukee County Parks and Trails maps will be available for an additional \$3 with the purchase of a 2016 passport. Net income from purchase of the passports & maps goes to the Park People for parks support and enhancements to our trails.

Check the Park People facebook page and website, plus the Oak Leaf Discovery Tour fan page on Facebook for more details as plans progress.

President's Perspective By Sue Spoerk

I was on the board of The Park People in 2009 when we went through our last Strategic Plan. We are again going through the tedious (but important) process. We have found ourselves struggling with the same question we did seven years ago, about whether or not to have advocacy in our mission statement? We are citing the same reasons now as we did then including duplication of efforts with Preserve Our Parks (POP) and that we risk

alienating donors and volunteers when we take sides. Through our very existence we are "for" Milwaukee County Parks but there are many wedge issues which can become divisive.

I met with the POP board in January to share our thoughts. It is a compliment to them that they do their job so well as Park Advocates. When The Park People formed in 1977 we were the only umbrella park group in town, but with POP's formation in 1999, we can divide and conquer and use our expertise more effectively.

I invite you to read prior President's Perspectives which lead up to this decision. We've done our homework by studying successful park groups throughout the country, for instance, Chicago follows this model of two park groups with different goals. Our issues in Milwaukee County are not unique, parks are fighting for funding everywhere at the local, state and national level. We wish taxes and user fees footed the bill to restore our parks to their once glory, but that is no longer the case. We need the generosity of the donor community to help fund parks. Our policy will not dictate what our Park Friends Groups do and we often find they are the most passionate advocates for parks they wish to protect. We will continue to work to make sure all 158 parks have a Friends Group and a voice in the community.



I am open to your comments and feedback (and will share them with the board) before we consider this issue at our March 24th board meeting as to whether to remove advocacy (with keeping a strong focus on education of park issues) from our mission. If the board adopts this change and a few years down the road, we find we made a mistake, the reasons for the change will be well documented and the board can reverse the policy. However, I personally feel this is the right step for The Park People to be a stronger organization which in turn will benefit the Milwaukee County Parks and have faith we'll be celebrating success at our 40th anniversary gala in 2018.

Friends Group Spotlight - Friends of Grant Park

2016 will be an exciting year for Friends of Grant Park. Building on our past decade of activity, our members continue the time-honored tradition of outdoorsmen and women everywhere - to leave Grant Park a better place than we found it.

Wulff Lodge restoration

Chief among our 2016 projects is chipping in to restore this hidden but neglected treasure in the woods. Friends of Grant Park wrote a grant to support restoration efforts of this 100-year-old lodge, which hosts Scout groups, AmeriCorps volunteers, and other nonprofits. We saw the

need and are taking the opportunity to help.

Eradicating invasive species

Our original focus remains our primary one: eradicating invasive species and restoring native habitat. Our successful track record of preventative work led us to grant awards to expand our restoration endeavors. We directed capital to revegetate some of the erodible slopes above our Seven Bridges Ravine and its creek which flows to the Lake.

Public engagement



Our March 12 annual Celtic themed fundraiser, Pullin' O' the Green, is deep in planning stages. The fun dinner at the beautiful Golf Course Clubhouse will again be served with musical accompaniment by the wonderful Garlic Mustard Pickers, a group who met, not surprisingly, while pulling our park's most widespread weed.



Grant Park is prime lakefront territory along the Great Lakes Migratory Flyway. We will continue to direct activities toward education around migratory bird species and their need for healthy stopover habitat. Every Sunday morning in May, join us for quiet walks to discover rare species that navigate from Central and South America every spring.

Perhaps one of the most exciting events this year will be the June BioBlitz, supported by a \$1 million dollar grant to the Milwaukee Public Museum. We're looking for volunteers who will accompany scientists and naturalists in a 24-hour marathon study of species diversity in our park. Date to be determined. Contact us to volunteer for the blitz!

This Halloween we are sponsoring a Trek or Treat through the Seven Bridges Ravines. A fun opportunity for environmental learning, groups of students will trek to treats while learning about the "dark secrets of the ravines' environment." It should be fun (and only moderately spooky).

Future visioning & improvements

Is there a skating rink in our future? Inspired by the Lake Park Friends who've managed the rink there, as well as by the loss of the historic Mill Pond rink due to siltation, we are in early discussions about how we might support the establishment of even a temporary skating rink in the park.

Dog walking in the park raises the question of how we might encourage proper disposal of the obvious. Do we install and manage waste stations? Who does this and how? Chronically underfunded parks staff is saddled and our own ranks are small. We are asking how to fund such an effort and ensure its success. Is there a paid permit in the equation?

Sharing the story

Wildlife in the park is well documented and respected. Photographers who document the healthy relationship of wildlife and habitat have multiplied recently. The efforts of these wildlife documentarians help protect our wild residents. FOGP maintains a Facebook page replete with beautiful photos from park-goers. Like us and post your own photos and videos!

Advocating for clean water and land

We advocated for the end to plastic shotgun wadding and lead deposition in our Lake and shoreline in 2014 and 2015. Forums were conducted to discuss parkland protection and preservation. We are also monitoring the Oak

Creek Watershed Restoration efforts. A forum for officials running for county offices this election cycle is in the works.

A forum for concerns

After-hours use of the park has raised concern among neighbors and the Friends, as has unleashed dog walking. With suggestions from neighbors, we successfully lobbied for ramp accessibility to the Area 5 shelter washrooms. The Friends group remains a vital forum for neighbors, park users, and the public to connect about what's going on in and around Grant Park. Our monthly meetings are the second Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in the Golf Course Clubhouse.

Celebrating shared resources

All are welcome to visit, walk or bike the newly resurfaced Oak Leaf Trail, and join us in our work to preserve and restore our parklands on the Great Lake. We hunger for a volunteer corps that is dedicated to this as well as one that encourages and invites participation of a continuing community of support.

Written by: Betsy Abert, Member and Conservation Chair, Friends of Grant Park, with gratifying help from member, Michael Timm.

www. Fogp.org or Facebook "Friends of Grant Park"

The mission of Friends of Grant Park is to preserve natural areas of the park, enhance unique features of the park, encourage use of the park, and to provide a mechanism for private contributions to supplement public funding of Grant Park.

Seeking New Board Members

The Park People is a board comprised of volunteer board members who share a passion for the parks and a willingness to make the parks better for today, tomorrow and future generations. We are seeking two new board members. Check us out, our bios are listed on the [website](#) and we think we are a pretty fun group. Board meetings are the 4th Thursday of each month from 6:00- 8:00 and board members usually spend about 2-5 hours per month on other board related duties. Our very capable Executive Director Jim Goulee keeps us on task and a cooler of cold beverages and homemade cookies can be found at most meetings. If you are interested, contact board President Sue Spoerk at 414.649.0440 or susan.spoerk@thomsonreuters.com.

The Park People Thanks it's Many Volunteers - We Couldn't do it Without You!

We especially want to offer thanks to the following volunteers for their great assistance in helping furthering the mission of The Park People: Joan Balzer, for her assistance with membership mailings, Harold Schmidt, Amelia Kegel, John Jordan, Amber Vavrusa and Kate Valerius for their assistance with the Oak Leaf Discovery Tour and all of the hearty people who have participated in our Weed-Out Program this past year!

