

OVERTON PARK

notes

spring 2017

Two months, \$1 million to take back the Greensward

For three decades, you could count on two things on any beautiful day in Memphis: Overton Park would be full of people, and the Greensward would be full of cars.

On the very days that Memphians flocked to one of the only wide-open spaces in the city's core, bringing their kites and blankets for an afternoon in the sunshine, the Greensward was clogged with cars spewing exhaust, kicking up dust, and rendering a third of the space unsafe, unsightly, and unsuitable for recreation.

That's all about to change, with your help.

Last year, Overton Park Conservancy commissioned and funded a study of parking and traffic in Overton Park by LRK Inc. The process included input from all the park's cultural organizations, our partners at the City of Memphis, stakeholder groups from universities to running clubs, and the community at large. The resulting report identified a path forward, with suggestions for reconfiguring and modernizing the Memphis Zoo's parking lot in ways that would require less use of land.

In July, informed by the results of the report, Mayor Jim Strickland proposed a compromise solution that



would add 415 spaces to the Zoo's lot without significant incursion into the Greensward. After working together to fine-tune the proposal, Overton Park Conservancy and the Memphis Zoo came to a consensus, and Memphis City Council passed a resolution supporting the project.

A steering committee was subsequently formed to move the project forward, with representatives from the Conservancy, the Zoo, the City, and the community. This winter, that committee selected Powers Hill Design to design and implement the parking lot reconfiguration that will eliminate Greensward parking.

The City asked that the Zoo and the Conservancy each commit to funding 50% of the project, with money for design and engineering to be raised by spring. This month, City Council passed a resolution requiring each organization to come up with \$1 million by June 11 in order to move forward with design.

Now we need you to help us get to the finish line.

Turn the page to learn how you can help.

Now is the time. We have two months to raise a million dollars, and we can end Greensward parking forever.

Footing 50% of the bill for this project is a major lift for a five-year-old organization operating a free resource with no admission or concession fees. While we won't know our final costs until the design process is complete, we estimate that our share will amount to around \$1.5 million.

This comes in the year when our initial five-year foundation grants have expired, leaving us to raise our full \$1 million annual budget with little in reserve. We're pivoting our focus to finally ending Greensward parking just as we find ourselves in greatest need of support to continue our operations.

That's how committed we are to returning the park to the people of Memphis.

The Greensward parking solution that we reached last summer protects the park from further non-park uses. It benefits park and Zoo visitors alike, offering a modern, environmentally sensitive design that should reduce congestion in and around the lot. And after this project is completed, Overton Park Conservancy can continue the momentum we've built over the past five years, making the park welcoming, accessible, clean, and beautiful.

Every step of the way, Overton Park Conservancy has emphatically demonstrated our commitment to finding a long-term solution to this problem. We've piloted shuttle programs, created a one-way traffic plan for major park events, and implemented multiple projects designed to improve bike and pedestrian access to the park. We provided 100% of the funding for the parking and traffic report, while participating in a six-month mediation process with the Zoo. We were ready this month with \$250,000 to kick off the planning process, and now we will take on the task of increasing that number to \$1 million by June 11.

This fundraising effort is our final step in getting this project off the ground. Raising \$1 million in two months will not be easy, and we will need all our park supporters to stand behind us, but together we can make this happen.

2017 is truly a make-or-break year for Overton Park Conservancy. If we succeed, we'll continue creating a world-class park, and **we'll do something no one has been able to do in three decades:** end parking on the Greensward. It's time for visitors to Overton Park to be surrounded by their neighbors, not their neighbors' cars.



The Greensward offers more than just large events. It's the perfect place to simply relax and get to know your neighbors.



The Greensward plays host to many festivals each year, including the Latino Memphis Festival, A Day of Merrymaking, Palestine Fest, the Margarita Festival, and Persian Festival (pictured).

To do this, we will need your commitment to be as strong as ours. If you've never given to the Conservancy before, please make an investment in what this park has become, and what it could be without cars at its center. If you have supported us in the past, we are sincerely grateful, and we would be honored if you would choose this year to double your gift. **Overton Park needs you.**



You can donate online at www.overtonpark.org/give or enclose a check in the envelope provided.

Bucks for Birds raises money to remove invasives

Invasive plants pose problems for an ecosystem like the Old Forest, disrupting the natural processes that support wildlife. The more than 100 bird species that use the Old Forest for food, shelter, or nesting suffer when non-native plants out-compete the natives they've come to rely on.

Worse, in the case of a shrub called nandina, which is native to Asia, birds can be poisoned and killed by these invasive plants.

This spring, we're stepping up for the birds and other native wildlife by removing nandina and another invasive shrub, mahonia, from the forest. And we're enlisting you--and the birds--to help!

When you make a pledge to our Bucks for Birds campaign this April, you'll be supporting our work to remove invasives in the forest. But you'll also be learning about the incredible diversity of bird life that passes through during spring migration.

Here's how it works: we'll be in the Old Forest in April, attempting to photograph as many bird species as possible. Because April is the peak of migration in our area, thousands of birds will use the forest as a rest stop on the journey to northern breeding



grounds. Last year, we photographed 45 distinct species, many of them tiny, brightly colored warblers who stop through our area for only a few days every year. This year, we're trying to beat that number.

Along the way, we'll post the photos on our blog, along with information about the birds. You'll meet the species that live here

year-round, as well as those that simply pass through.

We're asking you to pledge a dollar amount of your choice for every species we photograph. Pledge online at www.pledgeit.org/bucksforbirds, and your credit card will be charged at the end of April once we have the final tally. If you pledge \$1 per bird and we see 52 different species, you'll be donating \$52 to the health of the Old Forest.

As of this printing, our tally was up to 19 species. We're only at 56% of our pledge goal, so please give! Our invasive removal budget is \$20,000, and we hope to raise at least \$2,500 of that through this campaign.



TO PLEDGE: www.pledgeit.org/bucksforbirds

TO SEE THE PHOTOS: www.overtonpark.org/category/bucks-for-birds

Roots & Canopy Membership Events

This month we held our spring social event for Overton Park Roots members. Hosted by Memphis College of Art, the patio party featured art projects for kids, a look at MCA's El Nopal installation, catering by Whole Foods, beer by Memphis Made, and wine provided by Ecco on Overton Park. Thanks to all the members who joined us!

Our next event, date TBD, will be a presentation by a local scientist especially for our Canopy members. If you'd like to join either of these giving circles, visit www.overtonpark.org/membership.



Overton Park Community Farmers Market returns

April is here, and that means you can visit East Parkway Pavilion for the Overton Park Community Farmers Market. Presented by Baptist Memorial Health Care, the market runs from 3:00 - 7:00 PM every Thursday through October.

Now in its third season at the park, the market offers more than a dozen vendors offering fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, baked goods, and prepared foods. To ensure access to healthy local food, the market accepts SNAP/EBT cards and participates in the Double Green\$ program, which extends EBT dollars by providing up to \$10 more to spend on fruits and vegetables.

The market is a partnership between Overton Park Conservancy and Rhodes College. Its goal is to support a local food economy by providing fresh, affordable products accessible to all Memphians.



Follow Overton Park Community Farmers Market on Facebook or visit www.opcfm.org for updates on which vendors you'll find at the market each week.



Work begins on park access projects

It's about to get easier for cyclists and pedestrians to move into and around Overton Park.

The intersection of Poplar and N. Cooper St. has long been a popular place to enter the park on foot or by bike. But it hasn't been a particularly hospitable one. There's no landing place, and no sidewalk that leads to the other park roads or trails.



This project was conceived several years ago when the Conservancy participated in the Mid-South Regional Greenprint planning effort. Through a series of public meetings, we learned how visitors accessed the park, and the kind of improvements they needed to feel safe and comfortable coming to the park without their vehicles.

That will soon change, as design work began in March to develop a small entrance plaza, along with a trail connection leading to the Veterans Plaza Drive entrance to the park. A sidewalk will also be installed along Poplar between Veterans Plaza Drive and Tucker Street. Boundary and topographical surveys are complete, and Ritchie Smith Associates is developing design plans. We hope to break ground in 2018.

To fund this work, the City received a TDOT grant, and Overton Park Conservancy raised matching funds, with a lead gift from First Tennessee Foundation. A MATA grant was secured for the continuation of the sidewalk, which will improve conditions for bus riders visiting the park.

Other improvements identified in the Greenprint process included repair of sidewalks on N. Parkway, partially completed by the City of Memphis last year. We are currently seeking funding for the continuation of the sidewalk to the park entrance across from Rhodes College, which would include a pedestrian-activated flashing crosswalk signal.

Last fall, we raised funds to stripe high-visibility crosswalks at the busy Poplar/Tucker entrance. The City is set to complete that work this spring.

We're excited to move these access projects into the implementation stage, once again highlighting the importance of this urban park as a hub in our regional network of parks, trails and green space.

Gateways nearing completion



Tylur French's "Old Forest Gateway"

shape of Overton Park back in 1901. When you exit the forest into the park's open space, you're greeted with a reminder courtesy of Overton Park's designer, George Kessler, that the Old Forest is one of the most precious resources in Memphis.

The final gateway, Ben Butler's "Growth," was raised in February. A concrete sidewalk was poured, which had to cure over the following month before opening to foot and bike traffic. Over the next few weeks, Ben will finish up the welding and begin painting the structure. The last step will be finishing up the sidewalk and landscaping.

We hope the new gateways encourage visitors to think of Overton Park as one united space. Far from being a barrier, the Old Forest is an incredible natural resource at the heart of a rich cultural landscape.

All three new gateways to the Old Forest will be completed soon, beckoning visitors into the Old Forest to enjoy one of the most beautiful times of the year.

Yvonne Bobo's "Rhapsody" was completed last summer, and Tylur French's "Old Forest Gateway" went up in the fall. Recent finishing touches include bike racks, a bike pump, and plaques honoring donors Henry and Lynne Turley and Bill and Becky Deupree.

Two other plaques on Tylur's arch pay tribute to the visionary designer who created the



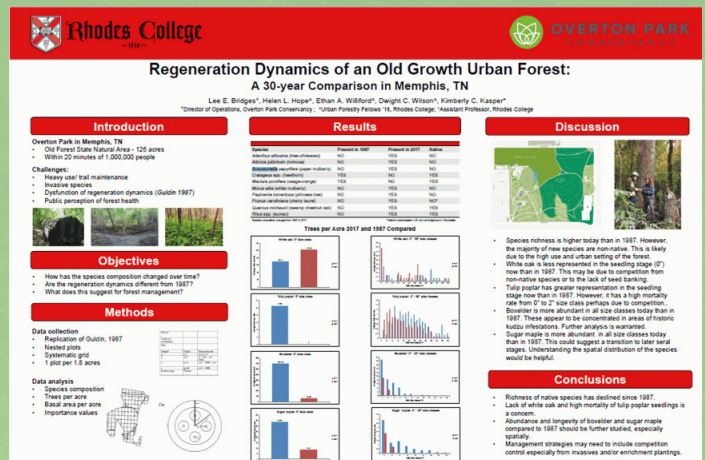
Ben Butler installs footings for the new sidewalk.

Playground resurfaced



Thanks to the generous funding of our donors through last year's ioby campaign, East Parkway Playground has a fresh coat of safety surfacing. The existing surface had many rough and torn patches, all of which were filled in by Vitirturf.

Fellows win poster contest



Congratulations to our Rhodes College Urban Forestry Fellows Helen Hope, Ethan Williford, and Mac Wilson, who won first place for their research poster at the International Society of Arboriculture - Southern Chapter conference. Visit www.overtonpark.org/2017/04/07/fellows to see the poster.

Brooks Lamb reflects on three-year fellowship

This May, Overton Park Conservancy will lose a valued member of our team, as Brooks Lamb graduates from Rhodes College. Brooks has interned with us for the past three years as part of his Bonner scholarship service component. His time at the park inspired him to write his first book, an oral history called *Our Park: Overton Park's Story Told By Those Who Lived It*. He's wrapping up editing and will begin shopping to publishers soon.



three-pronged positive effect. I also enjoyed being part of physical improvements like building a drainage ditch in the dog park and then coming back on a rainy day to see that the area is no longer flooding. We spread mulch in the playground and picked up trash in the forest, and it was always amazing to see what a difference we could

Here are a few thoughts Brooks shared with us about his journey from a farm in middle Tennessee to a bustling urban park in Memphis.

What made you choose Overton Park as your service site, and why did you stick around for three years?

BROOKS: My first year at Rhodes, I was extremely homesick. I loved everything about the school, but I missed being on the farm and being up close and personal with nature on a daily basis. The summer after my freshman year, I had a great experience interning at the Land Trust for Tennessee, so I knew I wanted to explore something in environmental service.

When I found out about an opportunity with the Conservancy, I jumped on it and was immediately inspired and motivated by the mission and the work. I was excited to not only have a good working relationship with the staff, but also develop friendships with everyone here. I just never wanted to leave. I felt compelled to do this work.

What were some interesting differences between urban and rural conservation?

When you're in a rural area, everyone has access to nature. In this area of the city, Overton Park is the one place people can go to be in a secluded forest or run around on the Greensward. Providing urban residents with the opportunity to connect with nature and with people of diverse backgrounds is incredibly important.

What are some of your proudest accomplishments?

I'm proud of developing the Park Perks program, which was beneficial not just for the Conservancy, but for local businesses and for our members. It has a

make with volunteers in a few hours.

Most of all, though, writing the book has been a lot of work, but I'm proud to have undertaken such a large project. I think reading the stories of people's experiences in the park will make others appreciate the park's value even more. You can read newspaper articles about the I-40 controversy, but it really comes alive when you hear directly from the attorney who successfully argued for Overton Park before the Supreme Court. And hearing directly from someone who spent the night in jail while conducting a sit-in to desegregate the park is so powerful.

How do you think this experience will serve you in your career?

I knew what I'd be doing some days when I walked into the office, but there were many more days when something important would come up. The variety of tasks was a continuation of my liberal arts education at Rhodes. I feel prepared for anything. I also appreciated getting to know park visitors, learning that there are so many different ideas of what the park should be, and learning how to talk about complicated issues.

When you think back on your time at Overton Park, what is the visual you'll have in your mind?

I love the people I've met through this experience. But I'll always remember walks through the Old Forest by myself during times when I was stressed out or needed to make a difficult decision. Walking through what is one of the greatest treasures Memphis has to offer, being able to lose myself in the oaks and tulip poplars....I was by myself but felt connected to nature and the earth. That's been so valuable for me to be right across the street from a place where I can simultaneously lose myself and find myself.

Keeping Rainbow Lake Playground shining

Since Overton Park Conservancy renovated Rainbow Lake Playground in 2013, it has been one of the most popular places in Memphis to play, imagine, and make friends with neighbors.

We knew when we set out to rebuild the playground that we didn't want a cookie-cutter set of equipment. With support from our incredible community, we made an investment in a space that would stimulate kids' imaginations, connect to the larger natural elements of the park, and provide a comfortable, shady place where people could interact with their fellow Memphians. The hundreds of people who spend their time here on any given day are proof that this investment has paid off.

The playground's immense popularity has also accelerated the need for maintenance, which in turn has accelerated our costs. The Big Green Mound, for example, is more of a brown hill after four years of foot traffic. Hammock swings have to be replaced frequently. The salvaged wood that was used as the basis for the large climbing structure is wearing quickly, and sections need to be replaced.



We've also been undertaking work to make the playground even safer without sacrificing its unique appeal. Last year, we worked with a certified playground inspector to conduct a safety audit. He identified some adjustments we could make to bring the playground into American Society for Testing & Materials (ASTM) compliance.

Our swingsets now have more space between swings, and the merry-go-round has a new top that's less likely to trap tiny fingers. We're planning to place a canopy over the metal slide that will reduce the heat it can absorb on a sunny day. We've made some modifications to the large climbing structure to increase wheelchair accessibility, and we'll be increasing the number of ADA-compliant play stations.

We'll also be making some alterations to certain structures that increase interactivity while also making them safer for smaller children. The rope swings under the Spiderwebs will become an anchored rope structure, and the hanging bars on the climbing structure will be replaced with different elevated play platforms. The design of the Big Green Mound will be altered to slow the rate of erosion and reduce the amount of mud that builds up at the base.

We'd like to thank AutoZone for helping to fund the improvements we've made so far. But we have a long way to go. If Rainbow Lake Playground is an irreplaceable part of your Memphis experience, please consider supporting it with a gift. Your generosity makes this a truly special place to play.



The merry-go-round recently got new parts that make it safer for small children.



Make your gift to Rainbow Lake Playground at www.overtonpark.org/playground-gifts.

Overton Park Conservancy gratefully acknowledges the individuals and organizations who made donations and in-kind (noted with an asterisk) gifts from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016. If we have inadvertently omitted the name of one of our supporters, we sincerely apologize.

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A Day of Merrymaking returns June 3

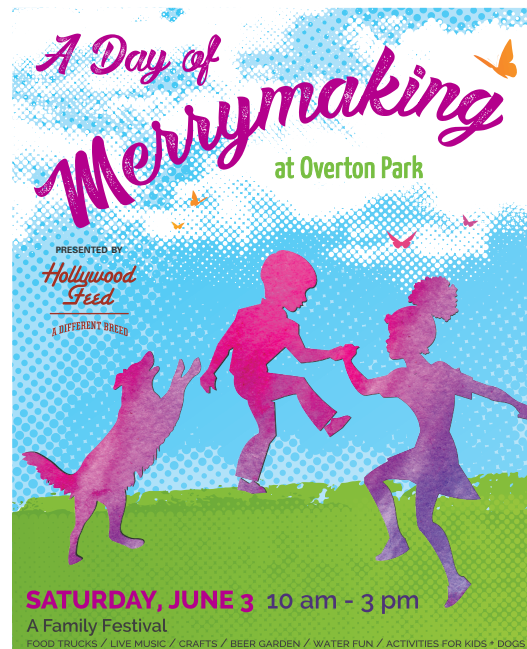
Now in its fifth year of celebrating summer on the Greensward, A Day of Merrymaking returns on **Saturday, June 3**. From 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, your family can enjoy live music, games, water features, food trucks, arts and crafts, local businesses, a beer garden, and much more. This year's event is presented by Hollywood Feed, so there will of course be plenty of fun for dogs as well!

Admission to the event is free, with a suggested \$5 donation to Overton Park Conservancy. Bring some extra cash for the beer garden and for the big water tag maze we'll be setting up to beat the heat.

Come ready to get into the swing of things, as Red Hot Lindy Hop will be giving swing dance lessons from the main stage. Following the lesson, you can put your skills to use as Zigadoo Moneyclips performs. Other entertainment will be announced soon!

Our beer garden, built and sponsored by our landscaping contractors at Echo Systems, will be generously stocked once again by Memphis Made. Your tips and donations will benefit the Conservancy.

The festival is always a great chance to sample food and merchandise from Memphis' small business community. The Rainbow Lake Playground parking lot will be filled with food trucks, and the Greensward



will host a variety of booths offering art, soaps, fresh flowers, information about services, and much more.

This year, we're aiming to make A Day of Merrymaking a low-waste event. With a grant from TVA, we'll be offering reusable cups at the Conservancy booth and in the beer garden. Clean Memphis and Get Green Recycleworks will be on hand assisting attendees with recycling eligible items.

Traffic will be one-way in the park for this event, so if you're driving into the park, plan to enter at Poplar and Tucker. We

encourage you to walk or bike in, or take a shuttle (details TBA).

Thanks to this year's sponsors, including our hosts, Hollywood Feed. Additional sponsorship is provided by The Art Project, The Daily News, Diane's Art Gift & Home, Diversified Trust, Ecco on Overton Park, Echo Systems, Eclectic Eye, Huey's, Hyde Family Foundations, Independent Bank, Lipscomb & Pitts, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis Made Brewing Company, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, MLGW, Morningside Neighborhood Association, SunTrust Bank, Utopia Animal Hospital, and West Cancer Center.



Visit www.overtonpark.org/merrymaking for a schedule of events and shuttle info.



VERTON PARK

CONSERVANCY

1914 Poplar Avenue, Suite 202
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901.214.5450

www.overtonpark.org

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Free tai chi classes by certified instructor Marjean Liggett resume on Tuesday, May 2 at 7:15 AM. You'll have two options this year:
7:15 AM, Formal Gardens
10:00 AM, East Parkway Pavilion
Both classes will be offered Tuesdays and Thursdays through June 15.