

OVERTON PARK

notes

fall 2022

Building the connection between people and nature

We know it intuitively: when we step into the Old Forest at Overton Park, we just feel different. Even though we're still surrounded by busy streets on all sides, we've walked into a place of calm, where we can take a deep breath.

That feeling is based in our biology: humans evolved to spend far more time in nature than we do in this age of screens, cars, and built environments. Spending too much time indoors has led to increases in everything from depression and anxiety to nearsightedness and Vitamin D deficiency.

For many of us, this feeling of relief via nature immersion became clearer than ever during the first year of the COVID pandemic. Day after day of struggle, isolation, loss, and grief took a toll on all of us, and for many, the park felt like the only safe place to escape.

Out of that somber time, Overton Park Conservancy's NatureZen series was born—a regular reflection on how connecting to the wild things around us could bring us peace and a sense of being part of something bigger and more permanent than ourselves.

As we began to emerge from the worst days of the pandemic and spend time with park visitors, we heard over and over that our community is seeking more ways to deepen their connection to nature. In particular, our conversations with youth representatives of the Center for Transforming Communities told us



Students from Carpenter Art Garden participate in a park scavenger hunt during NatureZen Week (photo by Madeline Rose).

that time spent in the Old Forest gave them feelings of safety, creativity, and peace, and they sought more ways to find that solace in the park.

Those conversations took place as part of our comprehensive park planning process, and they've pointed us toward a future where the Conservancy provides the link between our community and the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of spending time in nature.

A New Focus

A dedication to strengthening understanding and immersion in nature means developing more public programs. We're thrilled to announce that we have added a new member to the Conservancy team to

do just that. Dr. Malle Carrasco-Harris has joined us full-time to develop nature-based programming for both children and adults. Potential initiatives could include partnerships with schools to develop a curriculum incorporating the Old Forest, as well as bringing summer day camps to the park. For adults, regular talks about environmental topics and walks in the woods will deepen understanding and appreciation of the forest. Malle also hopes to create regional and national connections that broaden the impact of Eric Bridges' research into how we can manage urban forests for resilience in the face of climate impacts.

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A Week of Celebration

To kick off this new era for the Conservancy, in October we created NatureZen Week to pilot some programs we hope to repeat in the future and to celebrate nature's power to heal. Highlights included:

- The debut of our free mindfulness walks series, which brings volunteer guides from all walks of life into the forest to lead quiet, contemplative walks
- A workshop in nature journaling led by artist and educator Taska Sanford, in which local artists were encouraged to record their experiences in nature and focus on curiosity
- A talk by Florence Williams, author of the best-selling book *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*, in which she presented research showing that humans exposed to nature show reduced cortisol levels and blood pressure, stronger immune systems, and increased feelings of

happiness and well-being

- A scavenger hunt in the Old Forest with students from Carpenter Art Garden, using Taska Sanford's "Seek OUT!" illustrated cards
- A closing party for the Brooks Museum's "Evanescence" bubble exhibit featuring DJs and food trucks

Each of these events gave us the opportunity to spend time with our neighbors outdoors and to see the nature in our backyard in a brand-new way. We look forward to offering many more such programs in the future under Malle's leadership!

We'd like to extend a big thanks to our sponsors for NatureZen Week: the Brooks family, Echo Systems Landscaping, Eclectic Eye, Hampline Brewing Co., Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, and the National Environmental Education Foundation.

Immerse yourself in our NatureZen archives at overtonpark.org/naturezen.



Highlights from NatureZen Week (clockwise from left): Bishop Phoebe Roaf kicks off the first in a series of mindfulness walks; Taska Sanford leads a nature journaling workshop; artist Mia Saine reflects on the brilliance of a leaf; celebrating the Brooks Museum's "Evanescence" exhibit with Clubhouse Zen.

Jim Brooks cultivates deep roots at Overton Park

Ever since Overton Park Conservancy got off the ground in 2012, there's one thing our team could count on: if we had a volunteer work day in the park, Jim Brooks would be the hardest-working member of the crew. Long after everyone else had taken a much-needed break, we'd look over and Jim would still be pushing a load of mulch (or giving a wheelbarrow ride to our youngest volunteers!).

Along with his wife Jewell Ward, Jim has been a devoted supporter of the Conservancy and steward of the park. So when Jewell, their son Travis Brooks, and their daughter-in-law Taska Sanford approached us about sponsoring a visiting author in honor of Jim's birthday, we were thrilled for the opportunity to recognize his many contributions. Because of this generous sponsorship, we were able to bring Florence Williams to Memphis to present the findings of her book *The Nature Fix* as part of NatureZen Week.

Above all else, Jim Brooks loves trees. He cherishes his time with them, he cares for them, and he even builds things from their wood. In his career, he sold hardwood furniture as a member of the team at Colco Fine Woods & Tools. But in particular, he loves the trees in the Old Forest of Overton Park. The roots of his love for these trees go deep, like those of an old oak. He, Jewell, and Travis, along with his mother Margaret, settled in Midtown Memphis in 1979. They have been nurtured by the old woods in Overton Park ever since.

Jewell, who recently retired from her work as a medical geneticist at UTHSC and Le Bonheur, has walked, run, and biked at the park over the years. Travis grew from a toddler playing in the playgrounds



Jim Brooks and Jewell Ward recently had a blanket made with all their t-shirts from Overton Park Conservancy and various events in the park.

to racing bikes in the state championship there in high school (and winning a medal!). Margaret walked there every morning so that the woods could serve as muse for her poetry, and she has a plaque honoring her on the east entrance to the park.

For Jim himself the park has been an even more constant source of spiritual nourishment. From his early days running 5 and 10K races in the park, training for the Memphis Marathon, biking around the loop (and badly crashing once on the old traffic barriers), to teaching his son about ecosystems, leading (by example) his family out on walks to re-center themselves with nature, to sharing forest bathing notes with his daughter-in-law (whose own family home bordered the park as well) and introducing his grandchild Cedar to the park and its playgrounds, Jim has taken inspiration from the Overton woods for over 40 years.

Jim is not a person who can take without giving, and since the Old Forest has given him so much over the years, he has spent much of his time over the last decade giving back — as a volunteer to clear invasives, clean trails, rebuild playgrounds, and resurface the dog park (even though his cat felt betrayed!). The family also gives back by supporting the Conservancy mission whenever and wherever possible — most recently by sponsoring NatureZen week and helping to bring Florence Williams to speak.

Forest bathing highlights some of the many bounties that forests provide for us humans, but Jim reminds us that the trees also need gifts from us. Many of them were here first, and deserve our care and attention for years to come.



Jewell, Taska Sanford, and Jim with Florence Williams during her appearance at the Conservancy's NatureZen Week

Welcome to our newest Conservancy team members

We're growing! As we expand our focus to better engage the community and our supporters, we've added three new members to the Conservancy team.

Dr. Malle Carrasco-Harris, Programs Manager



Malle will be a familiar face to many park visitors. Her doctoral research on the copperhead snakes in Overton Park meant she could often be seen wandering the forest with radio telemetry equipment (and occasionally a snake in a bag!). We're thrilled to bring her on

to develop educational programming that will connect our community to the park in a deeper way.

Malle moved to Memphis ten years ago to pursue her first job as a high school biology teacher, and she and her dog frequently sought solace on the trails in Overton Park. She started wondering about the challenges animals face living in urban environments, and she and her advisors at the University of Memphis pursued those questions through her copperhead research. Upon graduation, she transferred her skills in spatial analytics to support research in store development at AutoZone. "All of these experiences have given me a greater understanding and appreciation for our human connection to place and nature," she says. "I am excited to join the Conservancy to pursue our mission and vision by developing programs that allow people to learn together about this gem in the heart of the city."

Her favorite Overton Park moment? "I once found one of my research copperheads next to a newborn snake, a sight few get to witness in the wild!"

Gloria Morales, Development Manager

Gloria is the newest addition to our development team and has been getting to know our park supporters to help us build for a sustainable future. She came to us from Freedom Prep Academy, and has also worked at Choose901 and Streets Ministries. "I always find myself in places where there's a meaningful purpose to the work, people are passionate about what they do, and there's always an opportunity to learn. These organizations have a



drive and passion for the city and creating change, and that's ultimately what motivates me."

Gloria remembers visiting Overton Park before the Conservancy was established, and she says the work that's been put into the park speaks for itself. "I've been able to see it

evolve over time, and I'm really glad that it's become what it is today," she says. Her favorite moment on the job so far was walking in the forest and seeing a cicada killer wasp for the first time. "It looked like it was riding the cicada like a scooter. I had a real 'what is nature?!' moment, and it sparked an interest to always be surprised by what's in the forest and to pay attention to how creatures are interacting. We're just bystanders while they go about their lives."



Kim Perry, Office Administrator

Kim, who joined us this summer to keep our office running smoothly, is the friendly voice park visitors hear when they communicate with the Conservancy. She moved to Memphis after graduating college in 2004 and has been

a regular park visitor since then. "I love that Overton Park has something for everyone in a beautiful plot in the middle of the city," she says. She loves putting in miles on the paved paths, taking her dog on the trails in the Old Forest, playing soccer on the Greensward, working through life with friends on long walks, and watching nature shift and change over the seasons in the Old Forest.

Her favorite park memory is of a time when she saw the forest in a new way. "After the ice storm a few years ago, we took our whole family on a walk in the park and it was so magical to see everything covered in a coat of ice. I loved the adventure of it all."

Overton Park provides deeply personal inspiration and connection

tina's message

Overton Park Conservancy passed its ten-year milestone earlier this year. For its first ten years, our work focused largely on the physical spaces of the park, working to improve maintenance standards and adding amenities that were requested through a significant number of public survey responses in 2011. Our comprehensive park plan will guide physical improvements in the park for at least the next decade.

In recent surveys, conducted during our planning process, park users began requesting programs related to physical and mental health, science education, and opportunities for social gathering. We've begun researching and piloting programs in response, and are now adding a permanent, full-time programs manager to the team.

It is more critical than ever that we focus on the needs of Memphians, on safe and welcoming places where kids can learn about nature or practice sports. Where programming teaches them how to be leaders, and how to protect our planet and its inhabitants. Where teens and adults can go to work on their physical and mental health, surrounded by a supportive and affirming community. And where people from widely diverse backgrounds come together and form "park friendships."

What I'm grateful for today is that our vision is intertwined with and affirmed by our collaborative partners, supporters, and funders, from the generous individuals and companies that allowed us to renovate the Overton Park 9 golf course and relaunch the Overton Park Junior Open, to the family of Jim Brooks who helped us kick off nature-based programs for kids and adults, to partners like the Thomas W. Briggs Foundation who recently celebrated our collective accomplishments with a generous award.

I am grateful for my own "park friendships" who give me encouragement and moral support, and provide a sounding board as we test out new ideas. I am especially grateful for and humbled by my dear friend Bena Cates, whose generous gift last year was made in my honor, and whose financial support is surpassed only by her encouragement and personal affirmation that we are on the right track.

It has always been true that Overton Park is a place of connection and inspiration and retreat for the people of Memphis. Our future plans simply highlight and celebrate this fact, and your support allows us to continue. Thank you for celebrating with us!



Accepting the Thomas W. Briggs Foundation Community Service Award from Foundation chairman Jim Witherington

staff & board

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OP9 debuts to rave reviews; clubhouse reopens soon

Five months after it reopened as the Overton Park 9, the park's golf course has welcomed many golfers who have been thrilled with the imaginative new layout by King Collins Golf Course Design. And soon, those golfers will have a place to congregate when they finish their rounds, as the Abe Goodman Golf Clubhouse is set to reopen in December.



Loren Roberts with Anya Gupta, runner-up, and Brittney Karunda, winner of the girls 10-11 championship flight at the Overton Park Junior Open (photo by Tom Bailey).

When the course welcomed its first golfers in late June, the community responded despite the nearly 100° heat. The course's previous record for most rounds played in a day was 135; on the first Saturday of OP9, golfers played 180 rounds. Historically, in a month's time, the course saw 600-800 rounds played, but this July OP9 registered 2,300 rounds. The design team's attention to detail, and determination to create fun challenges on each hole, gives golfers the satisfaction of returning again and again to play the course in a new way each time.

The Overton Park Junior Open, one of the longest-running youth tournaments in our region, returned in July. This year's OPJO brought in 180 registrants from across the area, up from the 29 that showed at the final pre-COVID OPJO. With tremendous organization, city support, local news coverage, and celebrity appearances, the OPJO delivered on its promise to



The golf clubhouse renovation includes an overhaul of the entrances, steps, and back terrace.

be the best junior tournament in Memphis, and perhaps the region.

With the course running smoothly under the management of manager Patrick Canale and superintendent Rob Roy, the focus has turned to the renovation of the clubhouse. Plumbing, electrical, structural repair, and tree work have all been accomplished. Interior walls for the golf/gift shop, hallway, bathrooms, and catering

kitchen are up and painted. Ceilings, floors, HVAC, and trim work in the Great Hall are being finished. Gone are the old ceiling fans, replaced with attractive new lighting. A smaller bar counter and the creation of a dedicated gift shop elsewhere in the building mean that the hall now feels like a true open gathering space. When the clubhouse opens, visitors will be able to sit in front of the fireplace on a new sofa or club chairs, surrounded by coffee tables made from a locally salvaged sycamore tree.

Outside, the old terrace has been demolished and new concrete poured. A wheelchair-accessible ramp now leads to the back terrace, with new steps, awnings, and a half-moon addition to the deck to be added soon.

Parks Dixon, co-chair of the OP9 committee, says, "We always had a vision of making this the most special golf space in the city, and that's what we're creating." He expects the new space to debut in early 2023 after the new doors and windows arrive from their manufacturers.

Parks remembers the dedication of the late George Cates, who spearheaded the reinvigoration of the course with an emphasis on quality, affordability, accessibility, and a family atmosphere. The OP9 committee recognizes this continuing responsibility to the city and to our donors. In this spirit, the committee plans to develop a reserve fund to allow for continuous improvements to the course regardless of golf revenue. The Overton Park 9 will be a showplace that will allow our youth to hone their skills at a first-class venue and create pride for the people of Memphis.

Greensward parking to end permanently in 2024

It's official: Greensward parking will end in 2024, and 17 acres of mostly-forested land will come under the Conservancy's stewardship in the coming months. Both the Conservancy and Memphis Zoo boards recently voted to approve a memorandum of understanding that moves the Zoo's maintenance facility to the park's southeast corner, freeing up space to add new parking that will eliminate the use of the Greensward on busy days.



On November 21, the Zoo, City, and Conservancy officially signed the agreement that will end Greensward parking. Back row: Councilman Jeff Warren, Conservancy board member Mary Wilder, Zoo board chair Jerry Shore; front row: Zoo President and CEO Matt Thompson, Mayor Jim Strickland, Conservancy Executive Director Tina Sullivan

The southeast corner, which is currently occupied by City services, will be divided into two portions: the north portion will house the Zoo's maintenance facility, which will make use of existing buildings on the site; and the south portion will come under the Conservancy's management. Our comprehensive planning process over the last several years was conducted with the understanding that the Conservancy would take over the entire space, which led us to go back to the drawing board when

this better solution was proposed. The opportunity to reclaim the entire Greensward along with the currently-fenced forest acreage was ultimately a better choice for the park, and we look forward to presenting new proposals soon.

The Conservancy is working with our planning firm Design Workshop to develop concepts for both our portion of the southeast corner and the new

acreage in the center of the park. Expect that forested acreage to be added to the existing trail system, and for the area around Rainbow Lake to gain a more natural feel and function.

The City plans to move its operations out of the southeast corner by the end of next year, at which point the Zoo will move in. Construction on the Zoo's new lot should begin in early 2024, and with its completion, Greensward parking will end permanently.

Fall Fetch Fest celebrates 10 years of Overton Bark

This fall, Hollywood Feed honored ten years of its partnership with Overton Park Conservancy by matching \$10,000 in community donations to Overton Bark, in addition to its regular annual support of the off-leash park. We were also honored to receive a grant from the Boyd Foundation's Dog Park Dash campaign to make improvements to the dog park including fresh mulch surfacing, repairs, and installation of a new water fountain and new trash cans. To celebrate, Hollywood Feed hosted a Fall Fetch Fest in October with giveaways, a caricature artist, and treats from their bakery.



Sponsors support the park with funds, hard work

We want to give special thanks to two of our long-time corporate sponsors, each of whom supplemented their financial support of the Conservancy this fall with employee volunteer events.

In September, International Paper volunteers spent the morning clearing invasive trees and vines from an area near the sixth hole of the golf course. The company also donated native trees that will fill this and other spaces in the park. After the volunteer event, International Paper joined the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Environmental Education Foundation in sponsoring a tree giveaway in which we distributed 250 native tulip poplars, maples, magnolias, redbuds, oaks, and dogwoods to the community.

In October, Hollywood Feed team members came out for a volunteer event and helped us clean up Overton Bark in preparation for installing fresh mulch surfacing. The crew got everything looking beautiful for the next weekend's celebration of the dog park's tenth anniversary!



Left: Volunteers from International Paper removed invasive plants from the edges near hole #6 of the Overton Park 9, making way for native plants to thrive.

Center: International Paper also coordinated a tree giveaway at Rust Hall (photo by Demarcus Bowser Photography).

Right: In preparation for Fall Fetch Fest, employees from Hollywood Feed raked leaves and made repairs at Overton Bark.

New Overton Park merch available!

Still looking for a holiday gift for the park lover in your life? We've got lots of new items in the Overton Park online store! This fall, we were excited to partner with Allie Arcos of Made to Dream Co. on a new line of apparel and tote bags highlighting the park's natural beauty.

Snag your tees, sweatshirts, and tote bags at overtonpark.org/shop.

