

OVERTON PARK

notes

november 2017

tina's message

In the six years since Overton Park Conservancy began managing this space, the most important thing we've learned is that we can always trust our community to come through for the park.

When Memphis City Council gave us two months this spring to raise \$1 million in order to end Greensward parking, more than 1,000 people answered the call. You hosted concerts, held benefit dinners, posted calls to action on social media, and dug deep to make sure we met that deadline. It was your input that shaped the solution, which benefits both the park and the Memphis Zoo.

When a strong windstorm came through Memphis in the middle of the night on May 27, we awoke to find splintered trees covering Rainbow Lake Playground, the limestone trail, and Veterans Plaza Drive. A massive oak had fallen into Overton Park, causing major damage. Our staff was assisted by multiple park users who simply sprang into action and helped us clear limbs from roads and play surfaces.

Just as we can always count on you, we want you to know that you can always count on us.

Our crews are in the park every day, making sure restrooms are stocked, trash is emptied, and the park is welcoming and clean. We're updating playground equipment to meet the highest safety standards (and encourage more imaginative play). With the help of volunteers, we keep safety surfacing fresh, plantings looking beautiful, and drainage ditches cleared.

But even as we stay on top of the daily challenges of operating a popular public space, we are constantly looking to the future. Major changes are on the horizon for the park: Memphis College of Art has announced

it will close after meeting obligations to its current students. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is exploring a move to the riverfront. The City of Memphis plans to move its vehicle maintenance facility out of the park's southeast corner, clearing the way for a return to parkland after nearly 100 years of industrial use.

The park itself is changing, accommodating more visitors as it once again becomes a true community gathering space. These big changes require careful, visionary planning--and they require your voice. The people of Memphis must be involved in the discussion of what fills the vital artistic and cultural roles played by the museum and the college, as well as how the park's southeast corner can be converted into public space.

We are ready to work with the City of Memphis and our partner institutions to ensure that the park remains a world-class cultural and recreational destination.

continued on page 2



The National Black Box Performing Arts Festival is one of the many cultural events we're proud to host in Overton Park.

That's why we're embarking on a parkwide master plan next year, which will address how Overton Park can best serve our diverse community. We'll be exploring how to meet the needs of all our visitors, make the park accessible for current and potential users, and strengthen our institutional partnerships. With so much opportunity on the horizon, it's more important than ever that we work together to shape an inclusive, imaginative future for a place that's been at the center of Memphis life for more than a century.

As the park faces this transitional period, a strong Conservancy--and our strong partnership with the City of Memphis--is the key to making informed, community-driven choices for the park. While these losses are painful, we must take this opportunity to come together and discuss how to make Overton Park's second century as beneficial to Memphians as its first.

We've got a lot of work ahead of us. Luckily, we already know we can count on you.

Tina Sullivan

Greensward project moves forward

Thanks to a community of park supporters who helped Overton Park Conservancy raise \$1 million this spring, the project to permanently return the Greensward to Overton Park is ready to move forward.

Powers Hill Design has begun its initial surveying and data gathering for the project that will reconfigure and optimize the Memphis Zoo's existing parking lots. They will use that data to develop three concept plans, which they will present to an advisory team consisting of:

- **Jack Stevenson**, City of Memphis, Division of Engineering, project manager
- **Mike Flowers**, City of Memphis, Division of Parks and Neighborhoods
- **Kyle Veazey**, City of Memphis, Communications
- **Chuck Brady**, Memphis Zoo
- **John Conroy**, Memphis Zoo
- **Tina Sullivan**, Overton Park Conservancy
- **Eric Barnes**, Overton Park Conservancy
- **Anne Pitts**, Levitt Shell
- **Mary Wilder**, Overton Park Alliance
- **Cato Johnson**, Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare

The concept plans will also be posted online at www.memphistn.gov/parkingplan, and community



members will be asked to submit feedback via an online survey or an e-mail to zooparkinginfo@caissaps.com.

The Powers Hill team will then incorporate feedback from the advisory team and the public, honing a revised concept plan to be presented at a public meeting. Following

another round of feedback, Powers Hill will refine the plan and submit a final version to the City for approval to move forward to design development.

We anticipate that the first public meeting will take place this fall, with construction to begin in 2018.

We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who donated, hosted fundraisers, spread the word, and contacted friends in every state asking them to give. (We only missed South Dakota!) Thanks to all of you, we met an ambitious fundraising challenge, and the finish line for Greensward parking is in sight after three decades. See page 7 for a list of donors to the Greensward campaign, and stay tuned for updates on how you can provide your feedback on the design.



The City of Memphis parking plan website hosts updates, explanations of the project process, and an archive of all public feedback at www.memphistn.gov/parkingplan.

Park partners launch pedestrian safety campaign

Overton Park is serious about pedestrian safety.

In October, all six park institutions—Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Levitt Shell, Memphis College of Art, The Links at Overton Park, Memphis Zoo, and Overton Park Conservancy—launched a campaign to increase pedestrian safety in and around Overton Park.

Signage has been placed at key points in and around the park where drivers interact with pedestrians, reminding drivers to yield and pedestrians to be aware of their surroundings. Because the park is heavily trafficked by cars, cyclists, and pedestrians, the aim is to remind everyone that it should be considered a safety zone where extra care is warranted.



Memphis College of Art students cross Poplar in front of a banner encouraging drivers to slow down.

The Be Aware messaging is an application of the global Vision Zero campaign, which seeks to eliminate 100% of pedestrian fatalities while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. The Memphis Medical District Collaborative launched Memphis' first Vision Zero campaign earlier this year and generously shared materials to extend the campaign into Overton Park.

Support for the enhancements to pedestrian safety at the Poplar and Tucker intersection came from an ioby campaign created by the Conservancy last summer. With matching support by ioby and Transit Center, a New York City-based foundation focusing on improved mobility in cities, we raised funds to make this high-traffic intersection safer for pedestrians. Earlier this year, the City of Memphis re-striped crosswalks and installed countdown clocks with a protected period for pedestrians to cross Poplar.

The park institutions invite drivers and pedestrians to sign a pledge of awareness at www.mdbeaware.com.

Final gateway goes up



The third of our new Old Forest gateways, funded generously by Bill & Becky Deupree and Henry & Lynne Turley, was completed this summer. Artist Ben Butler created “Old Growth” to evoke familiar natural patterns. You can enter through this gateway when you visit the East Parkway side of the park.

Listening tubes installed



This fall, Tylur French and his team from Youngblood Studio installed the latest exciting improvement to Rainbow Lake Playground: a set of colorful listening tubes that allow kids to talk (and make lots of noise!) from different parts of the wooden climbing structure.

Volunteers keep the park clean and green



Memphis Dream Center volunteers cleaned up storm damage at Overton Bark.

As a small staff working with a lean budget, Overton Park Conservancy relies on the generosity of volunteers to accomplish critical tasks in the park.

Safety surfacing in Overton Bark and Rainbow Lake Playground has to be replenished twice a year, and it can take days to fully distribute it. Picnic tables become worn and vandalized and require annual painting and sanding. The formal gardens and Veterans Plaza need regular tending, and in every case, our teams of volunteers make it look easy.

We are grateful to everyone who picked up trash, dug leaves out of a drain, spruced up a trail, and hauled away limbs with us this year. You are truly essential to the park!

Thanks to all the groups who have worked with us this year:

- Boys and Girls Club of Greater Memphis
- Christian Brothers University
- Comcast
- Daughters of the American Revolution, River City Chapter
- FedEx
- International Paper
- Medtronic
- Memphis Dream Center
- Park Friends
- Rhodes College
- ServiceMaster
- University of Memphis
- University of Missouri Black Men's Initiative
- Volunteer Odyssey
- White Station High School



The White Station Muslim Students' Association organized an inter-faith cleanup day in the park this fall. (photo courtesy WSHS MSA)

Vendor opportunities at Overton Park



Say Cheese food truck (photo by Phillip Van Zandt)

As Overton Park continues to grow in popularity, businesses are serving park customers by offering everything from ice cream to bike rentals to fitness classes. In order to make sure that all businesses are complying with City and park regulations, Overton Park Conservancy requires all vendors to complete a vendor permit application.

Commercial food vendors, food trucks, bouncy houses, fitness boot camps, photographers, and all providers who wish to offer a product or service within the park boundaries are bound by our Vendor Permit Policy. We ask all vendors to complete a permit application and provide us with a copy of their current business license and proof of insurance. All approved vendors are listed on our website.

If your business would like to serve park customers, visit www.overtonpark.org/vendors to complete the permit application.

Donor Spotlight: Vishant Shah & Emily Shortridge

When Vishant Shah and Emily Shortridge moved to the Memphis area in 2014, they originally landed in Germantown but found themselves driving into the city almost every weekend to visit Overton Park. The walkability and sense of community became a magnet drawing them to Midtown, where they purchased a home within walking distance of the park. They became involved with Overton Park Conservancy's Roots program, and in 2017, Vishant joined the Conservancy board.

We sat down with them to talk about why support for parks is important.

Q: What makes the park special to you?

ES: I grew up on a farm, so it's important to me that Sahil [their four-year-old son] have access to this place as he grows up. He loves the playgrounds and the Greensward. Because we don't have a big yard, the park is an extension of his everyday activities: learning to ride a bike, playing soccer, and making friends.

VS: The park is where Memphians come. If you want to see a cross-section of Memphis, this is it. Part of that is because of the variety of amenities. Especially in divisive times, the park has a role to play.

ES: It's easy to close a gate; it's harder to find a place like this that is open to everyone.

Q: You've lived in nine other cities. How does Memphis' relationship with its park system compare?

VS: I grew up in Minneapolis, where there are parks on nearly every corner, and always with something going on. I consider that the gold standard for city parks.

ES: Memphis is starting to catch up to other cities in acknowledging the importance of parks. Cities can be overstimulating, and parks are a relief from that. At Overton Park, you can find a quiet place, you can find a MEMPop, you can find a beer. While we've lagged behind other cities, that means we can learn from their successes and challenges.

Q: How can the community be supportive of Overton Park, and parks in general?

VS: Collectively, if we value the park, we need to invest in it and believe it can be even greater. Because we have no gates and charge no admission, it's sometimes harder for people to know how to get involved. Things like a cultural event on the Greensward are great ways to plug in.

ES: I'm a strong believer that tax dollars should support parks. That investment acknowledges that parks are a public good.

VS: Memphis' renaissance means that we will have many public goods, and those will need to be maintained and funded beyond the initial investment. As people begin to realize the value of these places, they will open their pocketbooks and give of their time.

Q: Why did you decide to support Overton Park Conservancy?

VS: Parks get very modest taxpayer support, and that makes success challenging. But you can still come to the park every weekend and there's something new going on. We stumbled on a bike rental business a few weekends ago; the farmer's market wasn't happening until the Conservancy and Rhodes College developed a partnership to bring it here. Even without a reliable source of money, the bathrooms are clean and there are new things being planned and tried. We invest both time and money in the park because it's a valuable resource for us.



Vishant and Emily with their son Sahil

Members experience a different side of the park

Our Roots and Canopy members are incredible supporters of Overton Park Conservancy's work. Their annual gifts (\$240 a year for Roots members, \$1,000 a year for Canopy members) offer us a reliable source of funds to maintain the park.

In return, we offer members unique opportunities to learn about what makes the park so special. Roots and Canopy members are invited to two social events per year, and Canopy members can attend additional educational events with scientists and researchers.

This September, our Canopy event featured lunch catered by Ecco on Overton Park and a talk by Malle Carrasco-Harris, a graduate student at University of Memphis whose work focuses on the Old Forest's copperhead population. Malle shared that she has



captured and tagged more than 200 snakes in the Old Forest, and offered a hint for knowing when these well-camouflaged snakes might be nearby: their musk smells like the bottom of your watch does after you've been sweating!

We recently held our annual Flashlights in the Forest tour for Roots members and their families. After enjoying food and

beer donated by Marco's Pizza, Memphis Made Brewing Co., and MEMPopS, families were led by Conservancy staff and volunteers into the woods just after dark. With flashlights in hand, we listened for owls and carefully turned over logs and leaves to look for nocturnal insects.



We'd love for you to join us at these events! Become a member of Roots or Canopy by visiting www.overtonpark.org/membership.

A Day of Merrymaking moves to October 6, 2018!



Our family festival brought thousands of Memphians to the Greensward this June. Next year we're planning a fall festival with fun on the Greensward and in the Old Forest. To see photos from this year's event, visit www.overtonpark.org/merrymaking.

Thanks to our 2017 sponsors:

- Hollywood Feed
- A2H
- The Art Project
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- Belleair Woods Neighborhood Association
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- Central Gardens Association
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Artwork by Adele Lemm



VERTON PARK

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