

# Quarterly Update



Foundation  
for Geauga Parks

SEPTEMBER 2025

## Thompson Ledges Celebrates A New Chapter

Known for striking rock formations, deep crevices, bubbling springs, and panoramic views, Thompson Ledges have long been a beloved natural landmark. Once a popular 19th-century picnic spot, the area became Geauga County's first public park in 1941.

Over time, littering and vandalism took a toll. Dedicated park commissioners often spent countless volunteer hours removing trash and scrubbing graffiti from the ledges to preserve this community gem.

A major turning point came with a generous gift from the Francis Spatz Leighton Trust. Francis, a Thompson native and acclaimed author, left a bequest to create a wildlife refuge on her family's land. When that plan proved unworkable, the trust funded the development of a new indoor Nature and Learning Center, surrounded by themed outdoor features celebrating the forces of nature and human history.

Designed by retired Geauga Park District Naturalist and former Foundation for Geauga Parks Trustee, Dan Best, the interpretive plan includes engaging indoor exhibits—like a 3D diorama of the Sharon Conglomerate rock face—and outdoor panels on geology, ecology, and wildlife. Playful elements like wildlife silhouettes and a black bear sculpture add family-friendly charm.

To honor Dan's lifelong dedication, the Thompson Ledges Park Commission has created the Dan Best Nature Awareness Fund through the Foundation for Geauga Parks. This permanent fund will help preserve Thompson Ledges and its Nature Center for generations to come.



Dan Best with Covia Best Sand staff and Foundation Executive Director Christine Davidson



Dan leading one of the Foundation's Explorer Series Guided Outings



Dan leading kayakers in Eldon Russell Park (photo: Gus Lanese)



All welcome for the **Grand Opening of the Frances Spatz Leighton Nature and Learning Center** on Saturday, September 27, 2025. Ribbon-cutting 1:00pm | Public Celebration 1:00-5:00pm



### Donations to the Dan Best Nature Awareness Fund:

<https://bit.ly/fgpdonate> or form on back



Read more about this project in the Geauga Maple Leaf:

<https://bit.ly/Dan-Best>



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# Geauga Park District: Two Decades of Growth & Impact

At the August Foundation for Geauga Parks Board of Trustees' meeting, Matt McCue, Deputy Director of the Geauga Park District (GPD), shared an update that left us in awe of the work accomplished to preserve and enhance Geauga County's natural spaces.

Today, the Park District manages more than 10,700 acres of land across 25 open parks and preserves. Of that, about 8,200 acres are open to the public, while the rest are conservation properties carefully stewarded for future generations.

To truly appreciate the Park District's impact, Matt walked us through just the past 20 years of growth (2005–2025):

- 4,948 acres of new land under management
- 9,095 linear feet of restored streams
- 31 acres of wetland restoration
- 180 acres of meadow restoration
- 16,281 native trees planted

And that's only half the story. In the same time frame, the Park District built:

- 13 new parks
- 9 shelters
- 10 enclosed lodges
- 8 playgrounds
- 20 restroom facilities

These aren't just numbers—this Park District work is trails walked, picnics shared, children playing, and habitats restored. It's an incredible investment in the quality of life for everyone in Geauga County.

Looking ahead, the next five years of GPD's Strategic Plan will emphasize maintaining and upgrading existing parks and facilities, while also working to connect open spaces throughout the county—like expanding the Maple Highlands Trail.

The Foundation is deeply grateful for the tireless work of the Geauga Park District staff and leadership. Their dedication ensures that our parks remain vibrant, welcoming, and resilient, safeguarding both the natural world and the community's access to it.

## ON THE BALLOT THIS NOVEMBER

The Geauga Park District Board of Commissioners has placed a 20-year, 1.2-mill renewal and increase levy on the ballot. If approved, the levy will help fund capital improvement projects and operating expenses. For homeowners, the cost would be approximately \$23 per year per \$100,000 property valuation (Geauga County Auditor).



The event features live music from Southbound, a popular local band that plays today's hits and classic county favorites.



Chagrin Valley Astronomical Society will bring their telescopes for guided stargazing.

# Twilight Untamed: A Night for Nature

Mark your calendars for Twilight Untamed, the Foundation's signature fundraiser and one of the most exciting nights of the year! This lively evening is the perfect mix of fun and philanthropy—a casual, welcoming atmosphere where you can relax with friends while making a real difference for Geauga County's parks, trails, and nature education.

Guests will enjoy a spread of sweet and savory bites, paired with wine and local craft beers. The silent auction features exclusive getaways, sports tickets, and even a once-in-a-lifetime chance to sing with the band! Feeling lucky? Try your hand at the ever-popular Bourbon Pull or win one of a dozen themed gift baskets. Tickets are just \$65, with every dollar supporting the protection of local natural spaces and opportunities for outdoor discovery. Bring your friends, join the fun, and help us keep Geauga's wild places thriving.

**BUY YOUR TICKETS TODAY!** <https://bit.ly/twilight-untamed>

## Thank You

### Silver Sponsors



## KNUTH'S

### Bronze Sponsors



Linda L.  
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PhD







# Checking In On The Frohring Meadows Pollinator Garden & Play Area

In 2022, the Foundation and the Geauga Park District held the grand opening of the Pollinator Garden and Play Area at Frohring Meadows. The installation serves as a demonstration pollinator garden and an area where children can get an up close look at pollinators and play year round. Here's how the garden looks in year three. As you can see in the lower right photo, it remains irresistible to children.

## Spring 2025



## Summer 2025



SEEN AT FROHRING MEADOWS: Geauga Park District's Vicky Liptak was commissioned to paint the three cement cylinders - this first creation features native flowers and hummingbirds. The second will feature the night sky and the third, a beehive.

The Foundation is continuing to develop its Pollinator Program to help more residents create pollinator-friendly areas in their own spaces.



Checking In

[foundationforgeaugaparks.org](http://foundationforgeaugaparks.org)

440-564-1048



# HIKE-A-THON

H I K E • R I D E • B I K E • R U N

 Foundation  
for Geauga Parks  
Connecting Community with Nature

June 15 - July 31, 2025

## HIKE-A-THON

raised

**\$13,552**

for Geauga County parks

*Thank You*

*Congratulations!*



**Hike-A-Thon Top Fundraisers**  
Top Individual Paige Orvis (right) and  
Top Team Team Thriving Women!

## *Thank You Sponsors*



Andy & Nancy Bushman



The Lundstrom Family



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*Looking Back*



# Business Sponsor Spotlight

Local businesses and organizations are essential to the Foundation's success, providing in-kind donations, sponsorships, and project support. Their contributions help connect people to nature through our events and initiatives. Learn more about one of our key sponsors: Burton Station Fixture Company.



by Kelly Donahue, SurePath Strategies

With a workplace culture that can be described as “everyone having each other’s back,” Burton Station Fixture in Middlefield goes about its business quietly growing while giving back to the community.

The manufacturer of custom commercial casework and retail store display fixtures began operations near Chagrin Falls and moved to its current location at 15240 Burton-Windsor Road, in 2008, just as a major downturn hit the markets. Tyler Pollari, who with brother, Travis, joined their father, Mark, the founder of Burton Station Fixture, in the business, said the company realized quickly it would have to pivot to withstand the economic downturn. Since then, investments in state-of-the-art fabricating equipment have moved the needle. Now a regional leader in custom cabinetry and countertops, residents may have seen Burton Station Fixture custom work in a local business like Wild Eagle Saloon.

One of the interesting twists in their business has been manufacturing sauna parts. The smell of freshly cut red cedar from the western United States and Canada fills one large area of the 36,000-square-foot facility. Neatly stacked pieces of cedar are ready for use in Sisu Lifestyle sauna kits, a growing product line supplied by Burton Station Fixture. The sauna business taps into the family’s Nordic roots. Tyler, who serves as senior project manager, said his grandfather’s parents emigrated from Finland and settled in the Huntsburg/Middlefield area.

As a family business it’s not surprising that Tyler, 37, Travis, 34, and Mark have created a strong team. “We’re like a minivan with a NASCAR engine inside,” Tyler said, noting the statement is one of Mark’s favorite quips. “I’ve been working here in some capacity since I was 16,” Tyler said, noting that he has a “really good” relationship with his father and brother. The company employs several members of the Amish community, with whom Burton Station Fixture has strong ties. “We are stewards of the good relationship we have with the [Amish] community,” Tyler said. Many of the company’s team members have been working there for 10 or more years.

***Of the company’s commitment to the Foundation for Geauga Parks, Tyler said, “we all appreciate the park program in Geauga County.” “For those of us that spend most of the workday sitting at a desk, the Geauga Park District offers a necessary escape to nature. A place where we can all slow down a bit and leave behind our fast-paced jobs, even for just a moment. “I really value having a relationship with the natural world and having access to public lands in the county,” Tyler said. The Foundation for Geauga Parks is helping to make it happen.***



When Tyler Pollari isn’t crafting custom wood case pieces and display units, you’ll likely find him pedaling through the scenic roads of Geauga County — or lending a hand at a youth cycling group in the Geauga Park District.

For the past two years, Tyler has been a dedicated volunteer with the Shenanigans Adventure Bike Club, a vibrant program for kids ages 5 to 12. Meeting weekly at Big Creek in Chardon, the club focuses on more than just biking — it’s about building confidence, resilience, and life skills. Adventure Bike Club is a non-competitive, outdoor-based initiative that encourages kids to challenge themselves in a supportive environment.

“Our mantra is ‘do hard things,’” Tyler explains. Over the course of the eight-week camp, young riders not only strengthen their biking abilities but also forge friendships and learn to support one another. Tyler finds it especially rewarding to watch kids use their newfound skills to help each other with bike repairs — a true testament to the club’s spirit. Learn more: <https://www.shenaniganscycling.com/>



# Explorer Series

## Guided Excursions

The Foundation developed the Explorer Series Guided Excursions to help connect the community with nature. Each event is led by a naturalist or expert with deep knowledge of the subject. The series is free with RSVP - you can sign up beginning about two weeks before the event of your choosing, but all sessions are listed online.

**Read more about this Fall's offerings and register at: <https://bit.ly/468pyDn>**

## News & Notes

### We Love Our Board!



We are grateful to our Trustees who volunteer their time and talents to the betterment of our local parks and trails.

### Maple Splash Festival



The Foundation attended the Maple Splash Festival - thank you to the volunteers who manned our booth!

### West Creek Native Plant Sale

**Sunday, September 21**

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Creekside Collaborative

7000 Randolph Drive, Parma

Shop a variety of native trees and plants grown locally. Native plants are adapted to thrive in our region's soil and climate.

### Explorer Series: **Pollinators Aplenty**

**Saturday, September 6 • 1:00-3:00pm**

Katydid Lodge, Frohning Meadows



### Explorer Series: **Pedaling the Maple Highland Trail**

**Saturday, October 4 • 10:00am-Noon**

Rt. 608 Entrance, Headwaters Park



### Explorer Series: **Spring Creek Preserve Preview**

**Saturday, November 1 • 10:00am-Noon**

Spring Creek Preserve



### Explorer Series: **Walk in the Winter Woods of Whitlam**

**Saturday, December 6 • 10:00am-Noon**

Whitlam Woods



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## Twilight *Untamed*

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20  
8:00 PM

## Explorer Series

### **Pedaling the Maple Highlands Trail**

October 4, 10:00am - Noon, Headwaters Park

### **Spring Creek Preserve Preview**

November 1, 10:00am - Noon, Spring Creek Preserve

### **Walk in the Winter Woods of Whitlam**

December 6, 10:00 am - Noon, Whitlam Woods

**FREE with RSVP: [foundationforgeaugaparks.org](http://foundationforgeaugaparks.org)**



Our mission goes beyond trails and trees. We're investing in people—connecting kids to nature, supporting conservation efforts, and building a legacy of stewardship that will benefit Geauga County for generations to come.

Donate online by  
using the QR  
code or visiting  
[FoundationforGaugaparks.org](http://FoundationforGaugaparks.org)



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☐ My donation is a tribute.

☐ My donation is a memorial.

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*Make checks payable to: Foundation for Geauga Parks*

Please apply my donation to:

- ☐ Greatest need (unrestricted)
- ☐ Park & Trail Enhancement
- ☐ Nature Education
- ☐ Geauga Skywatchers
- ☐ Bridle Trails
- ☐ Pollinator Program
- ☐ Dan Best Nature Awareness
- ☐ Hiking Through Grief Documentary Film
- ☐ UH Geauga Community Wellness Trail