



## FRIENDS OF GWYNNS FALLS/LEAKIN PARK

1920 EAGLE DRIVE

BALTIMORE, MD 21207

[www.friendsofgwynnsfallsleakinpark.org](http://www.friendsofgwynnsfallsleakinpark.org)

Winter 2014

### *Stay Healthy–Take a Walk in the Park*



#### PONY RIDES ON SECOND SUNDAY

*Jo Orser*

There will be a new attraction on Second Sunday this year at the park – rides on ponies from City Ranch. When first approached approximately a year ago by the owner of City Ranch, Ahesahmahk Dahn, the Friends were very favorable to the idea of pony rides, but it took some time for City Ranch to go through the approval process required by the Department of Recreation and Parks. Unfortunately, by the time all the steps were completed, there was only one month left of the season to test the reaction of kids and their parents who came to the park for the last Second Sunday of the year in November. However, from the unusually large crowd who rode or watched that day, the approval rating was 100%. So, come April 2014, the ponies will be in the park ready to give a guided circular walk across the lawn and through the woods.

City Ranch is a 501c(3) nonprofit whose mission is to introduce city children to horses and horseback riding. Mr. Dahn's experience with horses began early in his life. He grew up in South Carolina helping with farm work that required handling horses and mules, and upon moving to Baltimore as an older teen he worked at

Glen Wood Country Club (also known as Nixon's Farm), again working with horses and, this time, a riding program.

The death of Mr. Dahn's nephew in 2006 from a gunshot was a life changing event for how he decided to spend his retirement years. Until then he had not thought of combining his love of horses with his experience of working with children as a way to give back to society. But those were two things that he felt he knew well, and the goal for him became how to combine them. He feels that City Ranch events provide an opportunity for many children to see a live horse for the first time, except for the few who may have viewed a Baltimore Arabber produce cart pulled by a pony. In the presentations that he now makes to school and Boy Scout groups and to

individual riders, he promotes an understanding that horses respond to the treatment they receive in the same way that people respond to treatment from others. In his view, his ponies serve as the therapist, and his job is to take the children to the therapist.

Now visitors who attend Second Sunday will have an opportunity to experience first-hand the understanding that Mr. Dahn believes their contact with the horses will promote: a kind touch and gentle word.



*Ahesahmahk Dahn, owner of City Ranch*

## OFF THE WALL ENCOUNTER IN LEAKIN PARK

*Zachary White*

I am a scientist and an avid naturalist. I often explore Leakin Park, walking its many winding trails of quiet beauty, binoculars at the ready, hoping to snatch a glimpse of an unfamiliar bird. And if on any given day birds are few and far between, I pull from my sack a tree finder and hone my skill in tree species identification. On one particular day, after a lengthy trek from Winans Meadow, however, I found myself standing in front of and thoroughly absorbed in a high-quality reproduction of Jan Van Kessel's painting "Noah's Family Assembling Animals before the Ark" (circa 1658-1708). Nothing wrong with that, except that I was in Leakin Park on the Orianda House grounds near the gazebo about a stone's throw from the woods. The experience was strange but welcomed.

My surprising yet pleasant encounter was orchestrated by the Walters Art Museum, in partnership with FOGFLP, as part of the museum's *Off the Wall: An Open-Air Exhibition*. The program's intent is to create encounters between the public and classic works of art in unexpected places. The reproduction referenced here is just one of 25 copies of works of art from



the museum's collection displayed throughout the city of Baltimore in open spaces.

Why was I so captivated by Van Kessel's painting? From a naturalist perspective, Van Kessel's beautifully executed painting represents a zoological window into the past, a time when naturalists were traveling the world over, seeking and preserving exotic wildlife for study and for the collections of their wealthy patrons in Europe. There, animal collections among the wealthy

were all the rage. Van Kessel, drawing from the collection of Archduke Albert of Brussels and his wife Isabel, was able to juxtapose images of wild turkeys (New World) lions(Africa), ostriches (Australia) and a unicorn (I doubt if they had one of those!). From a conservationist perspective, the painting reminds us of the crucial role of the City of Baltimore and FOGFLP in husbanding Gwynn Falls/Leakin Park, a constantly evolving park and wildlife haven, for posterity.

The *Off the Wall: An Open-Air Exhibition* reminds citizens of Baltimore of the wealth of fine art within our midst at the Walters. My hope is that Baltimoreans are equally reminded of its natural treasure, Gwynn Falls/Leakin Park, and seek it out as well.

## WATER PIPE PROBLEMS IN GWYNNS FALLS/LEAKIN PARK

*George Farrant*

Last August an alert hiker noticed a stream flowing steadily downhill through the park woods even though no rain had fallen in several weeks. Out of curiosity, he decided to follow the stream to its source and discovered city drinking water running out of a 20 inch storm drain in back of the Outward Bound parking lot. The hiker continued to explore the wetness area and found yet another water source bubbling at the surface in back of the yellow Trail House. The entire wooded area was of concern because the ground which would usually be dry at this time of the year was like a swamp. He called 311 to report the leaks, and eventually it was determined that the Department of Recreation and Parks Department was responsible for correcting the problem.

After persistent calls, with an increasingly alarming tone, a department maintenance crew discovered that the bubbling surface water was coming from a water pipe deep in the ground. It was a familiar scene to the workers, because that leak was near one that was replaced with plastic pipe two years before. Repair to the

leaking pipes was made more complicated by the site's location deep in a wooded area, which made access difficult for the large machines required for the work. But the necessary entrance was cut, and eventually 600 feet of very old galvanized pipe was replaced with new plastic pipe. However, after the water was turned on again, the increased pressure caused three more leaks to occur near one of Outward Bound's buildings. In December, City water was cut off to that building, and work was stopped temporarily due to the cold weather. Work will continue when warmer weather arrives.

Old infrastructure is a huge problem for the City, and the park system presents an unusual headache. Often pipes were originally placed in areas open at the time that they were laid, but over the years the changing vegetation became thicker and taller, making access very difficult. Moreover, there often are no utility maps dating back to the period the original work was done. Thanks to an alert hiker with a determined spirit, the replacement pipe now will stop the waste that probably had been occurring for more than a year.

## CARE FOR THE HERB GARDEN

*Jo Orser*

Every year at the Herb Festival there is a carefully manicured garden adjacent to the chapel for all to meander as they begin or end their wanderings among the vendors with their different wares. The festival dates back more than 25 years and with it the creation of the garden dedicated to Mary Lou Wolfe, the founder of the Baltimore Herb Festival.

Over time, the garden has grown and transformed. It began as a demonstration garden of herbs of many types with a special place held for the festival's featured "Herb of the Year." The original caretakers of the garden were members of the Baltimore Herb Club and the Herb Festival Committee. To these park enthusiasts a logical way to contribute to the park was volunteering year round with the necessary weeding, mulching and pruning to the



*Ed Simmons in the garden*

garden, and their work resulted in a showpiece at the festival. Following the original intent of the garden, only herbs were featured – no annuals. Over time, plantings have changed to also include flowering perennials. With reduced numbers caring for the garden, the emphasis at the festival has changed from a demonstration garden to a herb and flower show garden.

Since 2002, Ed Simmons, a Friends of Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park member, has been recruiting volunteers and organizing the garden's work sessions. For the past several years he has had the assistance of Karen Makino and last spring Kathy and Paul Anderson became welcome additions to the garden's upkeep activities. The group works on the third Saturday of each month from March through November.

Plans for this winter include pruning by the Baltimore City Department of Forestry of two trees that have grown so large as to brush heavily against the chapel's exterior. Warmer weather will bring the need for the usual care. Volunteers are needed to help with new plantings and new ideas for the garden. If you have a love of gardening with a special interest in herbs, please email Ed at [mobtowned@msn.com](mailto:mobtowned@msn.com).

## ORIANDA HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE 2013

*Heide Grundmann*

Snow falling on Orianda House didn't keep more than seventy park and history aficionados away from the annual holiday Open House in December. People who braved the weather were heard to exclaim: "The mansion and decorations looked beautiful, and the 'Winans' Russian Experience' presentation was especially interesting!"

Rick Smith's longtime love, care, and historical studies of the former Crimea Estate persuaded Steve Walk, the great-great grandson of Thomas Winans, to come from Newport, Rhode Island, with other family members, to tell the story of Thomas Winans, who traveled to Russia in the 1840s to help build that country's first railroad, linking St. Petersburg and Moscow. Mr. Walk centered his talk on the years at Alexandrovsky, six miles southeast of St. Petersburg, the site of Winan's railroad factory. Mr. Walk has researched the experience from multiple sources and has recounted the Winans history at museums in St. Petersburg where officials surprised him with a welcoming red-carpet reception.

In this, his first public presentation, Mr. Walk quoted a news article describing how much Czar Nicholas I was impressed by the "tall strapping young man in the red jacket,

trousers tucked into his boots." Thomas Winans, together with Joseph Eastman from Philadelphia and in coordination with George Whistler, won the contract to build 162 steam locomotives, 2600 railroad cars and 70 passenger cars in four years from essentially nothing. At the outset, there was no money or equipment so Thomas asked his father, Ross Winans, who was in Baltimore helping to build the B&O, to send him the equipment and tools needed to undertake the work. They trained their Russian workers to work in an assembly line fashion and impressively completed the contract in less than four years. Upon his return to Baltimore in 1849 Winans purchased the McHenry Estate and named it Alexandrovsky as a tribute to his Russian experience.

Thomas was awarded a proclamation of achievement from the Czar, which was accompanied by a solid gold ring studded with diamonds. Mr. Walk mused that the proclamation is still in the possession of the Winans' descendants; however the diamond ring has not been found.

As every year, the organizations relevant to the park and its history participated in decorating the historic house, grounds, and the trees which line the main floor, contributed to the ample refreshments, and volunteered during the event. Special thanks go to all who contributed.





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## A Great Park Advocate: Erik Dihle

*Antonio Carpenter*

One of the Department of Recreation and Parks staff members whom the Friends call on throughout the year is Erik Dihle, Baltimore City Arborist and Chief of the Urban Forestry Division. He responds to our requests for the removal of dead trees and for pruning shrubs, for assistance with the creation of the Native American Sacred Space as an Environmental Education Learning Space, and to the Hack the Parks initiative for reducing invasive plants in the park. He also promotes and encourages ideas for forest management.

Erik's responsibilities in the Department are numerous, and the jurisdiction is great. His division is responsible for the care, maintenance and preservation for approximately 125,000 city trees, including those along streets on sidewalks and



*Erik Dihle*

medians, as well as in Baltimore's parks, including its fourteen major parks and trails. Trees that fall during storms are also his responsibility and, of course, require immediate response from his work crew to ensure public safety.

He also oversees the TreeBaltimore tree-planting program, which is an initiative to increase the urban tree

canopy in Baltimore by planting over 8,000 new trees every year with the assistance of various organizations and volunteers. His work is a strong component of Mayor Rawlings-Blake's goal to provide a greener, sustainable environment that will help to attract 10,000 new residents.

Erik received his education in Botany and Plant Genetics at the University of California, Davis. Before coming to Baltimore, he was Director of Horticulture & Arboriculture for Arlington National Cemetery for many years. He also conducted a very comprehensive nationwide tree variety testing program for the US Dept. of Agriculture. Baltimore and the Friends are extremely fortunate to have a person of such experience, knowledge and dedication in our city, and, most of all, working with him is a pleasure.