



FRIENDS OF Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park

1920 Eagle Drive, Baltimore, MD 21207
www.friendsofgwynnsfallsleakinpark.org

SUMMER 2021

Leon Day Park Recognizes a Baltimore Baseball Hero

by Michelle Freeman, President, the Leon Day Foundation

Leon Day Park was named for the Negro Leagues great who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1995. Day, who grew up downstream in Mt. Winans, was discovered playing baseball in the sandlots of Baltimore and began his professional baseball career in 1934 with the Baltimore Black Sox. While he was widely regarded as the best fielding pitcher in the Negro Leagues, Day played every position except catcher. In 1942-43, he was named the best pitcher in the Negro Leagues. Over his career, his winning percentage as a pitcher was .708 and he consistently hit over .300.

The Hall of Fame recognition spurred pride in his hometown. In 1995, Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke renamed the Eutaw Street Plaza entrance to Oriole Park at Camden Yards "Leon Day Way". On August 23, 1997, the mayor renamed the former "Bloomsbury Oval," a meadows/playground along the Gwynn Falls Trail, as "Leon Day Oval," since then referred to as Leon Day Park. Funding for the park's baseball diamonds, basketball courts, playground, lighting system, dugouts and viewing stands was provided by Peter Angelos, majority owner of the Baltimore Orioles. It has become a source of pride for families in the Rosemont/Franklinton community.

The Leon Day Foundation, Inc. was founded in 2001 by Mrs. Geraldine Day, widow of the late Leon Day, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the education and preservation of the legacies of Leon Day and the Negro Leagues by encouraging local kids to take up baseball, perhaps developing skill levels that will one day lead to their recognition. Through the years, the foundation has sponsored various little league teams and a football team, as well as supporting the baseball team at Carver Vo-Tech High School. Currently, it sponsors the Yankees of the James Mosher Little League, a team for 9- to 12-year-olds.

In 2014, the Foundation established the Leon Day 10th Man Award, given annually to a senior baseball player at Carver Vo-Tech High School who best embodies the spirit and legacy of

Leon Day. The foundation is currently developing curriculum for a teen-mentoring program. This idea developed due to the unrest in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray. This program will teach high school aged kids to serve as mentors in their schools.

To learn more about the Foundation, follow them on Instagram ([leondayfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/leondayfoundation/)), Twitter ([@leondaypark](https://twitter.com/leondaypark)) and on Facebook (the Leon Day Foundation, Inc.) Emails can be sent to the foundation at leondaypark@gmail.com

**In 1942-43, he was named the best
pitcher in the Negro Leagues**



We Have Met the Enemy, and He is Us

Conservation and Advocacy in the Park

by Tony Crute and Chris Wharton

In last summer's newsletter we wrote about the ongoing threats to the Park's well-being, with emphasis on continuing assaults from public works and utility projects. These projects often require the creation of access corridors to accommodate heavy equipment, a process which is extremely destructive to the delicate urban forest environment. When permanent access roads are required, the damage is magnified and perpetuated. Therefore, we oppose heavy construction in the forest interior unless it is truly necessary. When projects are unavoidable, such as the sanitary sewer maintenance work currently in progress along the Gwynns Falls, our goal is to minimize the damage by advocating for the preservation of large trees, protection of the forest floor from erosion and soil compaction during construction, and the best possible restoration measures, including reforestation and invasive plant control. Inadequate ground protection and invasive plant infestations inevitably cause additional tree loss, diminished biodiversity and a generally degraded environment.



Stormwater Projects

For the past three years, we have been resisting three DPW stormwater projects that, as originally designed, entail far more destruction and fragmentation of forest habitat than could possibly be justified by their purported environmental benefits. While it is likely that these three stream "restoration" projects will eventually go forward, we are hopeful that the amount of clear-cutting and bulldozing in the forest interior will be less than in the plans we were shown in 2018. In a very positive development, the Forestry Division of Baltimore City Recreation & Parks (BCRP Forestry) now has an environmental compliance expert on staff whose job is to review the plans and monitor the work for all construction projects in the city's parks. GFLP has already benefited from this improvement. At Forestry's urging, DPW agreed to install heavy-duty timber mats along the banks of the Gwynns Falls, where sanitary sewer repairs are currently in progress. As we reported last year about the Chinquapin Run stream restoration in northeast Baltimore, horrendous damage can occur when contractors fail to adequately protect stream banks and forest floor from their heavy machinery. Friends of the Park can now sleep better at night, knowing that someone at BCRP Forestry is keeping an expert eye on these projects!

Granite Pipeline

Restoration efforts continue in the wake of BGE's Granite Pipeline Replacement project. In 2019, BGE contractors planted several hundred trees along both the old and new gas main corridors, and a good portion of these appear to be thriving. In 2020, about one hundred additional trees were planted in Winans Meadow and other areas by FoGFLP volunteers in cooperation with Baltimore Tree Trust. Along the new pipeline corridor, where trees are not permitted, BCRP has recently been planting native wildflower species in an effort to establish pollinator-friendly meadows.

In 2018, FoGFLP sued the City of Baltimore for turning over a 20-acre swath of park land (2.2 miles by 75 feet) to BGE at a vastly undervalued price, for the Granite Pipeline Replacement. The lawsuit continues to move forward at a snail's pace; the next hearing is scheduled for April, 2022.

A hearty crew of FoGFLP volunteers planted 10 smaller trees at the top of Winans Meadow



Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation

In 2002 Baltimore City entered a consent decree which required the City to upgrade and rehabilitate its aging sanitary sewer infrastructure. When the City of Baltimore's sanitary sewer was constructed more than 100 years ago, many of the pipes were placed along stream channels and forested valleys to take advantage of the natural slope. Over time, it became clear that the practice of tying sewer systems to the natural environment adversely affected the surrounding communities and wildlife.

2020 saw the inception of major sanitary sewer rehabilitation along the Gwynns Falls stream channel. Park visitors will notice this work off of Franklinton and Windsor Mill roads, where temporary and permanent access paths have been constructed in order to perform the necessary work. FOGFLP has been in close contact with the project managers, construction firms, as well as BCRP and DPW to ensure the least amount of deforestation and damage. We are working hard to make our voices and needs heard throughout the process so that future generations can partake in the magic that the Park has to offer. At this point, much of the sanitary sewer work currently slated for the Park has been completed. Many of the access paths that you may encounter in the Park will be replanted in the near future. A more substantial permanent path and possible stream restoration is in the works near the Windsor Mill trailhead. FOGFLP is actively

Park visitors will notice this work off of Franklinton and Windsor Mill roads, where temporary and permanent access paths have been constructed in order to perform the necessary work.

engaged with all relevant parties to ensure that all design plans treat the park with the respect it deserves, and strategies are put into place to restore any environmental losses.

It is important to understand these projects through the lens of social and environmental justice. Many urban areas, including Baltimore, went through an early boom in infrastructure and investment during times of federally-sponsored racial segregation. Over time, as cities have become increasingly diverse, infrastructure maintenance and investment have become a lower priority. This in turn has led to predominantly minority urban communities left with a ticking time bomb beneath their feet. FOGFLP has been involved in the consent decree process and is fighting for not just the preservation of the natural environment, but also the health of the community that the park serves. If the community around Gwynns Falls/Leakin is not flourishing, then the Park is not far behind.

Ecological Problems

The park continues to be stressed by deer overpopulation; BCRP is studying various strategies for dealing with this intractable problem, but it is unlikely anything will be agreed on any time soon. Scientific staff at BCRP are planning to fence in an experimental deer-free area in the woods near Rognel Heights, in addition to researching methods of invasive plant control.

Many of the park's ash trees have succumbed to the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an invasive species of beetle that will eventually destroy nearly every ash tree in the area. BCRP has applied for grant money for EAB remediation projects; hopefully this will eventually include reforestation efforts in GFLP.



Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an invasive species of beetle that will eventually destroy nearly every ash tree in the area.

My Pandemic Year in Gwynns Falls /Leakin Park

By Dustin Meeker

On an overcast afternoon in March 2020, a week after Maryland entered lockdown, I opened Outside Magazine's website to peruse new content, as I often do when work's mundanity triggers boredom. An article's title caught my attention: "Parks Are Closing - but Wilderness Is All Around You." The author's thesis was poignant: "[D]on't think of this as a prison sentence. Instead, it could be the chance for the reset we need. A chance to remember that we are always in the wilderness, which deserves our care everywhere." Just as I finished reading that resonant passage, a Pileated Woodpecker, as if on cue, dove past the window, landed on a tree in my backyard, and skittered around the trunk in search of insects. The coincidence was electrifying. Adrenaline coursed through my body; goosebumps covered my arms.

The Pileated Woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in the Eastern Woodlands, the size of a crow. Their bodies are a flashy pattern of black and white contrasting with bright red triangular crests that adorn their heads. Imagine a punk in a tuxedo sporting a tall, blood-red mohawk. If you've ever seen gaping holes in tree trunks or large sections of bark stripped away, the Pileated Woodpecker's imposing three-inch beak is likely the cause.

In the 15 months since the initial lockdown, visitation to the park increased significantly...

The woodpecker's dramatic and timely entry into my field of view drilled home the article's message: wilderness is not exclusive to remote, pristine parks; we exist within it, even in the most urbanized environments; and the lockdown can be a moment to shift our gaze from the far horizon to the nature outside our windows. I'll add that we can find optimism from observing the ecology in our communities and learning the natural history of our landscapes.

A century ago, during the Great Influenza of 1919, the Pileated Woodpecker's future was precarious. Intensive logging and habitat destruction across the eastern U.S. had caused the species to decline precipitously. Some states lost over ninety percent of their forests and wetlands during this period. It's unlikely that my quarantined counterpart in 1919 would have encountered Pileated Woodpeckers in West Baltimore as often as I do, if at all.

But the Pileated Woodpecker proved to be adaptable and resilient during a period of crisis and upheaval. The dwindling population persisted and adjusted to the fractured landscapes. As conservation ethics began to inform public policy, the forests of eastern North America regenerated. Under pressure from activists, governments acknowledged their role in conserving the natural places that are distinct to our nation and, accordingly, established parks, refuges, and nature preserves. Species that were once threatened, like the Pileated Woodpecker, rebounded and are now commonplace.



Throughout 2020, I continued seeing Pileated Woodpeckers in my neighborhood and Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park. Although my travel plans for the year became untenable, I found solace and enjoyment in exploring the biodiversity that exists near my home - in our park. I began documenting the species of birds that visited my yard, many of which were spring migrants who arrived from the tropics after navigating by the stars - a wondrous fact. I hiked with my young son daily and endeavored to see the world through his eyes. The awe I experienced from my day-to-day encounters ameliorated the depression and anxiety that had stricken me at the pandemic's onset. I am indebted to the Pileated Woodpeckers, the flowering Tulip Poplars, the Indigo Buntings, and the myriad wildlife that transformed my outlook from a bleak grayscale to brilliant technicolor.

My experience finding refuge and relief in our park at a time of personal tragedy and national trauma is not unique. In the 15 months since the initial lockdown, visitation to the park increased significantly, as first-time visitors and families ventured onto the trails for recreation, restoration, and recovery. Word spread quickly about the vast forest and extensive trails on the city's western edge, and vehicles filled the once quiet parking lots on brilliant spring days. This upward trend in visitation has sustained even as pandemic restrictions lift and the crisis wanes.

The past year's events underscore why Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park is one of our city's greatest resources and thus deserving of care and investment. Within reach of many city residents who, like me, have never traveled to Yellowstone or Yosemite, our park offers immersion into ecologically abundant landscapes. As the scientific community has demonstrated, time spent in nature can provide innumerable benefits to mental and physical health: stress reduction; sharper cognitive function; improved moods; relief from depression, anxiety, and PTSD. While the new visitors to the park may have come because there was nowhere else to go in a locked-down world, I suspect many return because they derive such benefits from their initial visit. Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park cannot solve the myriad public health and social issues that afflict Baltimore, but it is undoubtedly part of the solution.

Native Trees, Plants and Pollinators in the Park

by Peggy Cummings

Gwynns Falls Leakin Park is habitat for various mammals, birds and aquatic species. Hopefully you've seen or heard some of these creatures when you visit the Park. Invertebrates are a less obvious yet essential link in the web that supports the health of the forest, meadows and water sources in the park. Insect pollinators such as native bees, wasps, flies, butterflies and beetles are food sources for birds, small mammals, amphibians and reptiles. For example, a baby bird consumes over 100 caterpillars per day. No seeds for these little ones, their diet consists of soft insects provided for them by busy parents. Native plants and trees evolved with the native insects and are critical to healthy insect populations. Native oak trees support over 500 different species of butterflies and moths. It's actually a positive sign for birds and small animals when you see caterpillars feasting on leaves.

We are working to increase the number of herbaceous native flowering plants and grasses in the park.

The park's gardens are another important link in its food web. Flowering native perennial plants provide nectar and pollen as food sources for native insects. Many are also host plants for larval moths and butterflies. Native warm season grasses stabilize the soil and give seed and shelter for wildlife. Again, the native plant species that have coevolved with the insects and small animals provide the unique requirements for sustaining them. We are working to increase the number of herbaceous native flowering plants and grasses in the park. One challenge that we face is the appetite of the deer population. These hungry critters relish many of our favorite flower blooms. The deer usually avoid plants with strong scented or fuzzy, prickly leaves. In the fall, after blooms die and dry,



seeds fall to the ground to propagate new plants or are eaten by birds. Many beneficial insects make their winter homes in the dead plant stalks and so we wait until spring to remove them. When next you visit the park make sure to observe all the insect life in the forest and gardens to appreciate these tiny building blocks of a healthy forest.

Pollinator gardens are located at the Carrie Murray Nature Center, adjacent to Winans chapel and the nearby parking lot, and in front of the Cardin Pavillion at Winans Meadow.

To become a member of the Friends of Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park, please send this completed form along with your check* to: **Friends of Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park, 1920 Eagle Drive, Baltimore, Md 21207**

LEVEL: Individual ___ \$10 Family ___ \$20 Nonprofit ___ \$25 Patron ___ \$100 Sustainer ___ \$250

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-MAIL _____

*Contributions to FOGFLP are tax deductible.

PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

Bridget McCusker

Mission accomplished! As of June 5th, we have received over 60 returned ballots to approve new board members. Thanks so much for the wonderful comments we've received and let's hope next year will provide us the opportunity to vote by acclamation.

Since the Annual Report was sent in April 2021, the health outlook has continued to improve both locally and nationally and I am looking forward to an in person gathering before the year's end so we can celebrate Gwynns Falls Leakin Park and the many faithful friends who care so much for Baltimore's biggest and best Park.



Events Update

Second Sundays (Miniature Trains) started back up in June. After a complete shut down in 2020, we are excited to welcome back old and new friends. Please check our website for news and the Chesapeake & Allegheny Live Steamers (CALS) website, calslivesteam.org.

Parkrun also returned in June! Parkrun takes place on Saturdays at 9am in Winans Meadow. For more info go to parkrun.us/leakinpark.

Continue to check our website for news and events. We are planning several hikes this summer and fall. www.friendsofgwynnsfallsleakinpark.org

You can also stay in the loop by following us on Facebook at Friends of Gwynns Falls Leakin Park and on Instagram at [friends_gflp](https://www.instagram.com/friends_gflp)

VOLPE Property - As reported in the Annual Report (April 2021) and the end of the year letter (December 2020), the acquisition of the VOLPE Property is a significant milestone for The Friends of GFLP. It provides the opportunity for FoGFLP to continue the legacy created by the VOLPE founders over 50 years ago to save the park from destruction in order to extend highway 70 into Baltimore. We recently had a walk through of the property with representatives of the Maryland Environmental Trust and Baltimore Green Space and are in the process of securing a conservation easement to assure lifetime protection of the property from development. The location of the 13 acres is just off of the closed section of Wetheredsville Road in Dickeyville. A commemorative ceremony to honor VOLPE members both past and present will likely be held by the end of the summer.

Old Growth Forest Network- As reported in the December 2020 end of year letter, we are continuing our pursuit of Old Growth Forest Network designation for an area in the park. A conservation easement is one of the pre-requisites for OGFN inclusion, and thus we are pursuing that at this time. A member of our work group, Will Cook, is a founding member and former Treasurer of the OGFN.

GIS Mapping - For the last six months, The Friends of GFLP have been utilizing the professional GIS mapping services of Thayer Young, a local GIS mapping expert. Thayer has thoroughly traversed the entire park including remote areas that are seldom visited in an effort to help us to update and enhance our maps and digitize maps that can be accessed by visitors who seem to prefer using smart phones these days. We are very grateful to have him working with us and continue to utilize his skills to help us prioritize areas to include in the easement boundaries. More information is available on his website at www.cicadagis.com

Hidden in Plain Site

This year we worked to create a 5-minute video to explain why the Park is so vital to the health of Baltimore City. Check it out-- we are sure it will inspire you! The video is available for streaming on our **Facebook page** or at **Protect-the-park.com**.



Farewell to our friend Heide

Our dear friend and longtime FOGFLP historian Heide Grundmann passed away this winter after a valiant battle with cancer. Heide was a tireless advocate for the Park for decades, fighting against the highway, as well as co-founding both our organization and Nature Art in the Park. She could often be found gardening at Eagle Drive and attended every Second Sunday with her supplies to help children make nature art crafts. Fortunately her presence is still strongly felt along Heide's trail in the Crimea area of the Park, where Nature Art exhibits are available for discovery. Heide truly made the world a better place, and it would take a gargantuan effort to fill her shoes.

*Heide was a tireless advocate
for the Park for decades and
truly made the world
a better place*



Treasurer's Report

by Craig Close

The COVID-19 situation has delayed the Annual Meeting where a treasurer's report would be given. Therefore, this is an appropriate time to provide a report of the financial status of our organization.

There are two bank accounts; one is for Operating funds and the other is for Restricted funds. All deposits are made to the Operating Account. Any amounts which are restricted in their use are then transferred to the Restricted Account. At this time the Operating funds are slightly more than \$20,000. The Restricted funds are currently allocated to the Pipeline Legal Fund and the Nature Art in the Park sub-accounts. The total is greater than \$12,000. Further pipeline activity is delayed until next year, and there has been no activity regarding Nature Art because of the pandemic.

A very recent Restricted account was for work being performed by an intern at Carrie Murray Nature Center. A grant was assigned to FOGFLP for reimbursement to the intern. That transaction has been completed. Another example of Restricted funds were the donations made towards the Hidden in Plain Sight video which can be seen on the website. That transaction was completed late last year.

The primary expenditures so far this year have been maintenance items. One type has been for the boardwalk on the Wetlands Trail, which required screws and concrete blocks for footers. The other was for new trail signs, which required posts and sign boards from the Rec and Parks mill (Did you know there is such a thing?) as well as post supports and lots of nuts, bolts, and drill bits.

Current FoGFLP Board Members:

Victor Bennett (*new board member*)
John Chambers
Craig Close-Treasurer
Tony Crute - Secretary
Peggy Cummings
George Farrant - VP
Laura Henderson (*new board member*)
Karen Hull
Erica Lewis (*new board member*)
Bridget McCusker - President
Dustin Meeker
Jo Orser
Brenda Pinkney
Heather Rawlings (*new board member*)
Eric Somerville (*new board member*)
Amy Stump
Chris Wharton
Zachary White



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