



LANDLINE

spring 2021

Photo: Meagan Mulloy

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MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO

WITH LEMONS, MAKE LEMONADE

One positive thing to come out of this global pandemic is that when people are forced to stay socially distant and can't spend time gathering in restaurants, shops or bars, they find alternatives. Visits to our local public parks and preserves skyrocketed. The solace, comfort and openness of nature presented an opportunity to many of us who wanted to get outside, stretch our legs, and visit with friends and family in a safe and healthy way.

Over the last 25 years that I have been a part of Western Reserve Land Conservancy, I have found many occasions to be proud of our work. Last year was no different. When the lockdowns started, our team went into overdrive to open some of our private properties for public access. We created signage, cleared trails, and removed invasive species. We developed maps and brochures for people to enjoy on their hikes. We created landing pages on our website, hosted COVID-safe opening ceremonies for local partners and the media, and sent our supporters and followers messages letting them know new properties were open and available.

It was our plan all along to open Ashcroft Woods in Ashtabula County, Blue Heron Preserve in Memory of Janet Franklin Foster in Geauga County, Haley's Run in Summit County, Brighton Park in Cuyahoga County, and Oberlin Preserve in Lorain County to the public. The pandemic put those plans into high speed and by mid-summer last year, all five properties were open for visitors to enjoy.

But that's not all. We recently conserved our 800th property in Ohio. We are nearing 200 public parks and preserves we helped create. We've conserved over 65,000 acres. And we're not done.

Vibrant natural lands. Working family farms. Healthy cities. It's what we do at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Thank you for being a part of it all.

Sincerely,
Rich Cochran
President and CEO



Photo: Julie Hahn

Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Side Yard Program is making strides in Cleveland's Mt. Pleasant, Buckeye, Woodland Hills, Shaker Square, and Union-Miles neighborhoods. A big part of our work is about connecting people back to the land on which they live. The side yard program helps community residents secure and upgrade vacant lots adjacent to their homes and add them as extensions of their property. Since 2015, we have been involved in nearly 150 side yard transfers and upgrades, reclaiming neglected and undeveloped land and ultimately bringing it back into the community's care.

Delores Neil has lived in her Cleveland home for over 44 years. In 2018, she first participated in the side yard program by taking ownership of a parcel next door. She recounted many instances of illegal dumping, grass growing up to four feet tall, and many raccoons, possums, mice, and skunks that decided to make the abandoned property their own. At one point, 67 used tires were removed from the property in one single cleanup. After acquiring the property, Ms. Neil expanded her garden and fencing to deter dumping. Now her beautiful yard serves as motivation for neighbors.

"I hear from my neighbors across the street all the time, a young couple who want to know how to get a side yard like mine," she said. "It's been a great addition to my property and to the neighborhood."

Our team assists by providing step-by-step support in securing parcels from either the City of Cleveland Land Bank or the Cuyahoga County Land Bank, which often hold the deeds to these abandoned properties. We provide resources needed for upgrades and coordinate with contractors for each job. We partner with many other companies and organizations to aid in the completion of these projects, such as New Vista Enterprises Inc., a landscape design company owned by brothers Michael and Matthew Supler.

Althea Francis, a resident on East 117th street for over 10 years, has had similar success. As an at-home childcare provider, securing a side yard was both a priority for improving the value of her home and providing a safe place for the kids to play outside. Ms. Francis raves about the "family feel" she and her neighbors share. "We all look out for each other," she said. Like Ms. Neil, Ms. Francis gets lots of inquiries from other neighbors about how they can acquire side yard properties as well.

As we continue our efforts to transform vacant lots to reclaimed greenspaces, Western Reserve Land Conservancy will continue to support and engage with local residents to build a stronger, healthier, and more vibrant city.



OUT AND ABOUT



FINDING BALANCE IN NATURE

BY MADISON SHAHEEN

A new partnership between Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Cleveland Yoga brought two groups together to accomplish one common goal: get people outside and be one with nature. With more people trying to stay fit and looking for ways to gather socially distanced outside, we wondered how to bring Cleveland Yoga teachers and practitioners onto our conserved properties for some mindfulness and hiking. Yoga on the Preserve was the answer.

Each Yoga on the Preserve event was a unique yoga experience on a beautiful natural landscape. We hiked the beautiful Forest Ridge Preserve after a Baptiste Power Yoga practice on the lawn of our Conservation Center in Moreland Hills, looked out on to beautiful Lake Erie after listening to the sound of the waves during a practice at a private residence of a conservation landowner in Bratenahl, and learned about the conservation easement held on Orchard Hills Park in Chesterland after power yoga on Patterson's Fruit Farm.

Our #GetOutsideOhio campaign – designed to offer many ways in which we can all get outside and enjoy nature during and after the pandemic – inspired Cleveland Yoga to reach out and coordinate yoga events at our signature public preserves. “It’s a great partnership,” said Land Conservancy President and CEO Rich Cochran. “Nature is the perfect place to find balance and harmony. Yoga and meditation help calm the mind, body, and soul. We’re excited to continue working with Cleveland Yoga to get more yogis outside.”

CELEBRATING TREES VIRTUALLY

BY ELIZABETH GRACE

C OVID-19 stay-at-home orders in March 2020 forced the cancellation of our annual Arbor Day tree planting, but opened up a new opportunity to create a virtual Arbor Week experience. While we initially planned to plant 20 trees at the Michael Zone Recreation Center Park in Cleveland’s Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood, we quickly shifted gears to work with our partners in the Cleveland Tree Coalition to develop an entire week of tree-related content and activities across Cuyahoga County.

Virtual Arbor Week events were hosted by: Western Reserve Land Conservancy, City of Cleveland Mayor’s Office of Sustainability, former Cleveland City Council Ward 15 Council Member Matt Zone (who has since joined the Land Conservancy as our new Senior Vice President and Director of our Thriving Communities program), Cleveland Metroparks, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, Cleveland Public Library, Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, Davey Resource Group, Holden Forests & Gardens, and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District.

Events included live virtual tree walks and tree plantings, videos on volcano mulching, children’s book readings, and a wildly popular “Ask an Arborist” event with the Davey Tree Expert Company.

With support from the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Western Reserve Land Conservancy also mailed 100 free trees to Cleveland residents through the Arbor Day Foundation’s Community Canopy program. We held another virtual Arbor Week for 2021, partnering with the Arbor Day Foundation to conduct socially-distant tree plantings and develop engaging stories about the importance of trees and how to plant and care for them. We also hosted a Zoom webinar focused on growing trees in Cleveland with equity and justice that was attended by more than 100 tree advocates.



TIME TO #GETOUTSIDEOHIO!

BY JARED SAYLOR AND PETE MCDONALD

While COVID-19 has drastically changed all of our daily lives, one thing that remains constant is the wonder and beauty of nature. Northeast Ohio is rich in natural and historic resources including beautiful lakes, streams, and waterfalls; unique geologic landscapes; inspiring forests; and historic lighthouses, mills, and buildings.

At Western Reserve Land Conservancy we continue to work with landowners, communities, government agencies, park systems, and other nonprofits to permanently preserve natural areas and working farms throughout northern Ohio. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Land Conservancy has seen attendance skyrocket at the dozens of public parks and preserves we helped create. People want to get outside, and we are looking for ways to help.

In order to enable more people to enjoy the places we've helped conserve, we embarked on an ambitious project to open up a number of Land Conservancy-owned preserves for public access. Our #GetOutsideOhio campaign promotes parks that are now open and available for all.

"We have helped create and expand nearly 200 public parks and preserves across northern Ohio," said Alex Czayka, Senior Vice President for Conservation



Transactions at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "During this global pandemic, we've seen attendance at some of these parks and preserves increase by more than 100 percent. Getting outside and enjoying all the beauty that Ohio has to offer helps mentally, emotionally and physically. We are responding to this crisis the best way we can, by making more land available for everyone."



ASHCROFT WOODS

Ashcroft Woods Conservation Area contains approximately 1,000 acres of contiguous natural areas owned and managed by Western Reserve Land Conservancy. The central piece, a 379-acre property located in Rome Township in Southern Ashtabula County, provides 1.8 miles of nature trails open to the public between June and mid-September annually. The Grand River – an Ohio designated Scenic River – flows along the 1.2-mile western property boundary. The property's dominant feature is 178 acres of high

quality wetlands, including 52 acres of open water submergent wetlands, 45 acres of scrub-shrub wetlands, swamp forest, and isolated vernal pools. The majority of these wetlands are located on the eastern three quarters of the property and drain into the headwaters of Plum Creek, a direct tributary of the Grand River. The upland sections of this forest are largely composed of mature red oak, white oak, sugar maple, American beech, black cherry, and hickory while the floodplain areas adjacent to the river display black walnut, sycamore, black maple, and silver maple.

BLUE HERON PRESERVE IN MEMORY OF JANET FRANKLIN FOSTER

Blue Heron Preserve is a beautiful 116-acre gem that straddles the boundary between Newbury and Burton Townships in Geauga County. The property is located within the Cuyahoga River watershed and contains approximately 27 acres of wetlands that make up almost the entirety of the eastern half of the Preserve. The wetland includes open water, emergent marsh, wetland scrub-shrub, forested wetland plant communities, and appears to have been formed by glacial activity.

The western portion of the Preserve was used as a sand and gravel mine for 26 years before Western Reserve Land Conservancy purchased it from Newbury Sand and Gravel, Inc. and reclaimed the mine, restoring the property to a more natural state. Over the course of a few years the buildings and other mining infrastructure were removed, discarded materials and items were cleaned up, the steep edges around the pond were sloped and seeded with native grasses, and the mining roads were converted into hiking trails. We installed an agri-drain to control the water levels, a bridge was constructed by the Boy Scouts on the trail that extends through the pond, and native trees were planted



throughout the areas most impacted by the mining. The Land Conservancy also plans to actively control invasive species found throughout the Preserve.

The reclamation of the mine not only restored the beauty of the property, but also helped provide an inviting environment for many kinds of amazing native plants and animals. As you hike the trails, keep your eyes out for turtlehead flowers, bur-reed sedge, and great blue lobelia. You may be lucky enough to see or hear loon or sandhill cranes in the wetlands, a bald eagle passing overhead, or many different seasonal warblers, including the yellow warbler. Be sure to check out the overlook that provides incredible views of the Preserve's pond and wetland, the West Branch - Cuyahoga River valley to the east, and Burton Hill on the horizon. The Preserve has been created to pay tribute to the late Janet Franklin Foster who would have wanted the public to enjoy this beautiful property.



OBERLIN PRESERVE

In October 2015, Western Reserve Land Conservancy acquired a 63-acre property on the southern edge of the City of Oberlin in Lorain County, part of what is considered the Oberlin Great South Woods. The site is on the south side of Hamilton Road, near Lorain County Metro Parks' Splash Zone. The site holds historical significance, having been a stop on the Underground Railroad and the home of John A. Copeland, Jr.

Copeland was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, to freed African American parents. In 1843 when he was nine years old, his family moved north to avoid racial persecution and settled in Oberlin. He later briefly attended Oberlin College. Copeland became involved in abolitionist and antislavery activities, and participated in the successful Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. Copeland also joined the raid on Harpers Ferry where he was captured, convicted of murder and conspiracy to incite slaves to rebellion, and hanged on December 16, 1859. Copeland's final words became a rallying cry for enslaved Blacks throughout the south: "If I am dying for freedom, I could not die for a better cause. I had rather die than be a slave."

"Oberlin Preserve offers so much to the people of Oberlin and northern Ohio," said Andy McDowell, Vice President of Western Field Operations at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "Its rich history, beautiful prairie, and diverse flora and fauna make this an ideal location in Lorain County. We are proud to have played an important role in opening this property for the public to enjoy."

With few prairie areas in the region, the property provides a special glimpse at native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and pollinators. Since its initial restoration planting, nearly 600 native wildflower plants, more than 50 native trees, and 30 acres of prairie seed have been successfully planted by corporate and community volunteers, as well as students at Oberlin College. The pollinator movement has gained such traction within the community that Oberlin received city-wide designation as a Monarch City USA in 2019.

The preservation of this property as a natural area will benefit the public forever by providing scenic greenspace, areas for groundwater recharge and flood mitigation, diverse habitat for plants and wildlife, and an area for passive recreation and



education. This property sits at the head of a tributary that flows into Plum Creek and eventually into the Black River. Visitors have the opportunity to see woodcocks and other ground-nesting birds in the spring, as well as bluebirds and migratory warblers stopping over before continuing on their journey.



BRIGHTON PARK

Located adjacent to Big Creek, the former Henninger Landfill was a prime candidate for restoration. After nearly 20 years of disuse, the Land Conservancy seized an opportunity to transform the 25-acre property into a vibrant neighborhood asset while restoring ecological balance to the area. The Lower Big Creek trail and greenway will provide recreational, environmental, social, and economic benefits to the surrounding Old Brooklyn neighborhood.

Next door to the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo on the east side of Pearl Road, the Henninger landfill accepted non-toxic construction waste and debris for decades. The new green space contains scenic views of Big Creek and the Cuyahoga Industrial River Valley and will connect the neighborhood to the Ohio &

Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo.

The property was designated as public greenspace in the Lower Big Creek Greenway Redevelopment and Restoration Plan, the Cuyahoga Greenways Plan, and others as a priority for green space and connectivity. Acquisition of the property established the potential to create an important trail linkage from the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo to the Towpath Trail. The City of Cleveland, Cleveland Metroparks, Old Brooklyn Development Corporation, F. Buddie Contractors, Councilman Tony Brancatelli and a number of other project partners have been working on this project since 2006. The Land Conservancy became involved in this project in 2012 at the request of an adjacent property owner. By



acquiring the property with Clean Ohio funds in 2014, the Land Conservancy played a critical role in creating the opportunity to transform this property back into productive green space for the community and region.



On March 31, 2020, as the reality of the global pandemic started to sink in across the state and the country, Lori Criss, Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services said, "We know that being outside, getting fresh air, listening to the birds, seeing signs of spring, sitting by the water, these can all have calming effects. And it's a good opportunity to do that for ourselves each day."

No truer words have been spoken. Western Reserve Land Conservancy is committed to provide opportunities for Ohioans to get outside and enjoy the beauty and wonder of nature. To learn more about our #GetOutsideOhio campaign – including maps detailing all the public parks and preserves we've helped create and expand – please visit us at wrlandconservancy.org/getoutsideohio.



LAYING THE GROUND WORK FOR A BETTER CLEVELAND

BY ELIZABETH GRACE

With funding from Bank of America, the Saint Luke's Foundation and private funders, the Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities team, a backhoe and some shovels, a large block of empty parcels in Cleveland's Union-Miles neighborhood is now home to a park with 85 new trees. Jack Rabbit Hill, as it is known to neighbors, is a slice of nature in an urban neighborhood. Visits to the site over the summer yielded deer sightings, vintage glass milk bottles, and great conversations about what the prairie-like expanse will be in 10 years when new trees shade the foundation stones that can be upcycled as benches.

Several days of hard, physical work hauling woodchips and debris and prepping

holes ahead of planting paid off when neighbors joined our team on October 9th for a tree planting followed by lunch. In the 1970s, Jack Rabbit Hill was a ravine that flooded after heavy rains. Longtime residents pointed out how high the water was on the house at the corner of Way Ave. and East 96th. Sometime after the flood, the city filled in the old ravine with the debris left over from the demolition of the damaged homes. We know this because the backhoe pulled up cornerstones and an old brick chimney.

For the next three growing seasons, the Land Conservancy will maintain and water the trees at Jack Rabbit Hill, watching them usher in a new chapter for the land as they grow.

#TREES4CLE

BY ELIZABETH GRACE

On October 17th, Reforest Our City debuted a new iteration of a familiar idea, #Trees4CLE. Cleveland residents signed up in advance for a new tree for their yard, and picked them up from Rid-All Green Partnership on a sunny fall morning, perfect tree planting weather. Species profiles and a range of selections allowed homeowners to find a tree to suit any need, such as shading a deck (like northern catalpa) or to make a statement in the front garden in early spring (eastern redbud). For those who wanted a tree but could not come pick one up, Tree Stewards arrived at 9 a.m. toting shovels, ready to deliver and even plant the trees, if necessary. While COVID-19 forced us to temporarily pause planting trees, Clevelanders showed us that if we find a way to make it safe to plant and distribute trees, they will show up ready to do the work and adopt a tree.

ANNUAL LAND BANK CONFERENCE MOVES ONLINE

BY ZAIJA PELLIGREE

On September 23 and 24 Western Reserve Land Conservancy and our partners and sponsors hosted the annual Ohio Land Bank Conference virtually. 2020 marked the 10th anniversary of the conference, bringing together more than 220 land bank professionals and 40 speakers during 12 online sessions over the course of two days.

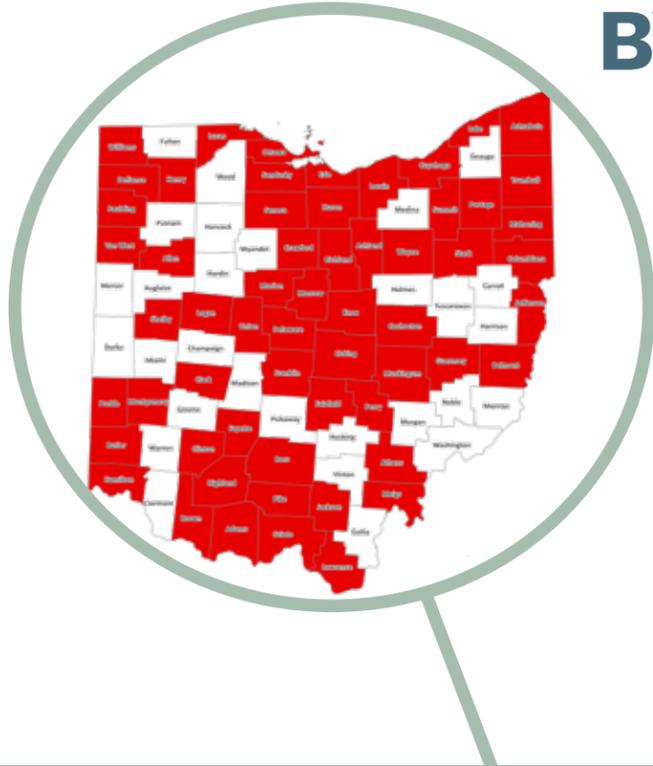
Session speakers debuted some new and timely learning opportunities such as "What Does the COVID-19 Crisis Mean for Land Banks?" presented by Loveland. This session discussed the growing real estate crisis that has developed during COVID, including increased mortgage delinquencies and evictions. Perennial favorites such as "Land Bank Success Stories" and "Historic Preservation" also had the opportunity to convene virtually, featuring interactive presentations and short videos produced by the Land Conservancy.

The live recordings of these sessions are posted on the Western Reserve Land Conservancy's YouTube channel. On that page, you will also find shorter videos highlighting certain land banks and their creative work across Ohio.

The dedication, innovation, and quick thinking of many Land Conservancy staff made the Ohio Land Bank Conference's virtual format possible. The pioneer who paved the way for the Land Bank conference, affectionately known as the "Mother of All Land Banks," was Robin Darden Thomas, who passed away a few months before the conference occurred. The 10th annual celebration took place in her honor.

BUILDING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

CONSERVING LAND, BY THE NUMBERS



25
major watersheds
supported



59
land banks
established

186
parks and preserves
created

278
farms permanently
preserved



812
properties
protected



14,000
trees planted and distributed in
Cleveland
to reforest the city

65,153
acres conserved



Photo: David Liam Kyle



Photo: David Liam Kyle



Chagrin Falls is a special place. Like many small towns, traditions endure and neighbors celebrate the history that unites them. Now, thanks to the passion and generosity of the Chagrin Falls community, as well as Western Reserve Land Conservancy's vision and professional expertise, the rich character of Chagrin will persevere through the preservation of the historic Bancroft House and the creation of a new public park at Grove Hill.

On May 9, 2020, the community and the Land Conservancy reached the goal to raise \$600,000 in 45 days to save the iconic Grove Hill landscape in Chagrin Falls from luxury home development. The Bancroft House remains a constant reminder of the history and spirit of Chagrin. Considered a grand mansion when it was built in 1878, the home has majestic views from the Village all the way out to the Civil War Memorial in Evergreen Hill Cemetery. The historic property is bordered along Main Street by a handsome old stone wall built by local workers during the Great Depression. All of these keystone assets will be preserved through our collective efforts, along with a big piece of Chagrin's history.

It was not an easy path. The project took commitment and perseverance from start to finish. Before a deal was reached, the Land Conservancy spent weeks in negotiations with the developer, studying the property's potential for preservation and working with the Village of Chagrin Falls to plan a perfect public park.

The fundraising campaign began just as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and Ohio Governor Mike DeWine issued stay-at-home orders. The Land

SAVING GROVE HILL

BY ELLEN MATLOCK

"There may have been a time when preservation was about saving an old building here or there, but those days are gone. Preservation is in the business of saving communities and the values they embody."

-Richard Moe, National Trust for Historic Preservation



Conservancy's deal with the developer was time-bound and quickly expiring. Our team and local volunteers had only six weeks to raise \$600,000 to purchase the historic mansion and surrounding property, or else watch helplessly as the mansion was demolished and the property was parceled into five private homes.

As community volunteers organized on social media and canvassed Chagrin with yard signs appealing to their neighbors for support, the Land Conservancy and the Save Grove Hill Committee managed a comprehensive campaign, including soliciting major gifts, sending thousands of letters to potential donors, conducting follow-up calls, and executing a comprehensive marketing campaign - all while operating remotely.

More than 1,000 donations and pledges were committed by passionate citizens from near and far. Contributions poured in from the local Chagrin Falls

community but also from as far away as Texas, Florida, and California. The Save Grove Hill Committee - comprised of six local families who initiated the effort to save Grove Hill - donated towards the cause to kick off the campaign. The Chagrin Falls Historical Society also contributed. A single donor issued a \$200,000 challenge grant to motivate giving and alumni from more than 30 classes of Chagrin Falls High School, including future graduating classes up to 2033, chipped in their support.

"This was a perfect example of how a community can come together to save an iconic piece of its history," said Rich Cochran, President and CEO of Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "Even amid a global pandemic, the people of Chagrin rallied to save the Bancroft House and surrounding property of Grove Hill. We were thrilled to be a part of this project and to play a role in preserving the charm and character of the Village

for generations to come."

With only days remaining until the deadline, the Land Conservancy met its goal, raising \$609,000 to purchase the property from the developer and protect an important piece of Chagrin Falls history. Now, the character of Chagrin will become even more thriving and vibrant as a community's values, legacy, and charm are preserved for generations of residents and visitors to come.

Since the successful conclusion of the campaign a year ago, Western Reserve Land Conservancy established permanent protections for the one-acre property through a conservation easement, limiting development on the site. The Land Conservancy has sold the Bancroft House to a buyer who has committed to restoring the property and preserving its historical significance. The new owners plan to make the Bancroft House their home. The Land Conservancy also donated the Grove Hill property to the Village of Chagrin Falls to create a park on the lower half for residents and visitors to enjoy for community gatherings, dog walks, picnics, and other activities that characterize Chagrin's cherished neighborhood atmosphere. The Village formed a committee this year to begin planning this park.

"This community never ceases to amaze," said Chagrin Falls Mayor Bill Tomko. "When the Land Conservancy approached us with this idea to purchase the property, we knew it would be challenging to raise the funds needed. But we also knew that saving the Bancroft House and creating a new public park was what the people of Chagrin wanted. I am proud of how we have come together to achieve this important goal."

SKUNK CABBAGE: A SMELLY PLANT FULL OF SURPRISES

THIS EARLY SIGN OF SPRING SPREADS A FAMILIAR, AND FOUL, ODOR.

BY SARAH KITSON



Ohio's native eastern skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is accurately named. When walking by a wetland, you may notice this plant's scent and think you've crossed paths with the finicky striped mammal. Its broad green leaves are a welcome sight in early spring before many plants wake up from winter dormancy. Plum-colored flowers speckled with green pop from the ground in shapes resembling ancient drinking gourds. Though the skunk cabbage's leaves die back each summer, the plants themselves can live up to 20 years. This common Ohio plant has many unique features that make it unlike any other plant in our region.

AN INDICATOR SPECIES

Skunk cabbage can be found in wetlands and on slopes with springs and seeps. This species is a good indicator of the presence of groundwater flowing into a wetland. The influence of groundwater is important to wetlands because it can provide a reliable water source during years with little precipitation. This allows wetland plants to thrive, even during dry periods. The cool temperature of groundwater also promotes wetland and stream health, affecting everything from the plants, to the bugs, amphibians, and fish.

A "WARM BLOODED" PLANT

Skunk cabbage is one of the few thermogenic plants (*thermo* is Greek for "heat" and *genesis* is Greek/Latin for "create"). This means that it can generate its own heat using a metabolic process called cellular respiration, reaching temperatures of up to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. This extraordinary ability allows it to jumpstart its growing season before other plants come out. The metabolic heat generated by skunk cabbage thaws the frozen ground and melts surrounding snow so that it can flower in the late winter months.

AN APTLY NAMED PLANT

Skunk cabbage's flowers and bruised leaves produce a putrid odor reminiscent of a skunk's spray. This scent is used to attract pollinators including flies, stoneflies, and bees. The metabolic heat produced by the plant both carries its scent and provides early emerging insects with a warm place to shelter. The scent of a skunk cabbage is also thought to be an antiherbivory defense, making the plant unpalatable to animals like deer that are looking for something to eat.

Ohio has many natural wonders that are easy to walk past. Next time you visit a wetland, keep an eye out for skunk cabbage and if you are feeling adventurous, take a whiff.

INCORPORATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE INTO LAND CONSERVATION

BY JARED SAYLOR

The Racial Equity Institute (REI), based in Greensboro, North Carolina, is "a Black-owned business comprised of a multiracial team of organizers and trainers who are committed to the work of anti-racism transformation." They provide training and consultation programs designed to help individuals, organizations, and communities grow their understanding and analysis of structural racism and its cultural and historic roots.

Before the pandemic, REI hosted in-person trainings and seminars with hundreds of nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, businesses, and universities across the country. They have since transitioned to web-based group meetings with tremendous results. Thousands of Ohioans have participated in REI's two-day seminar, joining a growing force of alumni committed to racial equity.

By the end of 2021, every member of Western Reserve Land Conservancy's staff and Board of Trustees will be added to the list of REI alumni.

In August, I participated in a 2-day Phase 1 REI training, facilitated by REI trainers and hosted by Cleveland's ThirdSpace Action Lab. It was a transformative experience. Having worked for environmental nonprofits for nearly 20 years, I am fortunate to have experienced diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice trainings and seminars through a variety of facilitators and organizations. As a person of mixed racial background – and as a generally kind-hearted human being – racial equity is an important part of my identity. I've had many occasions to experience, witness, and learn from structural racism, and apply all that towards positive and equitable results for my family, community, and work. The REI training was a shock to all that I knew.

REI's model includes multiple phases of training, education and action, providing a deep look into the history and structural nature of racism. Trainers seek to educate us on how the roots of our country and national identity are intertwined with a racist structure. History is often the best guide, beginning with the first slave ships to arrive in Port Colony in the English colony of Virginia, through the redlining of neighborhoods in the mid-20th century to the myriad ways we experience and contribute to racist ideologies today.

Phase 1 of the training is designed to develop the capacity of participants to better understand racism in its institutional and structural forms. Phase 2 helps emerging racial equity leaders identify their struggles and challenges in light of the racial equity analysis outlined in Phase 1. Phase 3 work is where an institution, organization, or network puts the analysis and tools from Phases 1 and 2 into practice. If knowledge is power, after completing Phase 1 I felt like I could bench press a truck.

The Land Conservancy is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice because we know the value it brings to all of our work. These principles make us better partners and advocates for our communities, for the land, for our natural resources and for our mission. We know that this commitment extends far beyond a few sentences on our website; it is something that is woven into the fabric of who we are and what we do. Our leadership team has made the investment to train all staff and trustees through the REI model, and to take that learning and develop new practices for land conservation built on a foundation of racial equity. We are also committed to building a racial equity framework for our organization that guides our hiring and retention practices and serves as the basis of our service delivery. It will not be easy. It will not be quick. It will not ever be complete. But it will make us better, together – and that means a healthier, more vibrant community for us all.

SPORTING CIRCLE EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES

BY KENDRICK CHITTOCK

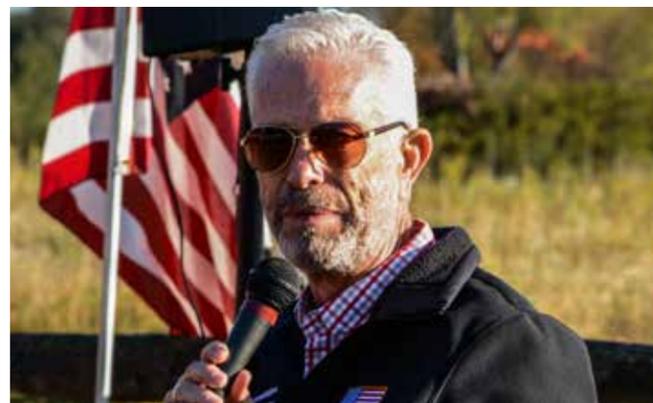
Cars began to arrive well before sunrise. Men and women in heavy jackets gripped steaming mugs of hot coffee as they watched the first light of day creep across an open meadow. A thick layer of fog slowly receded away from the warming sun. More than 30 American flags mounted along the wooden fence danced with each chilly breeze. On this crisp October morning, people chatted joyfully, excited about the day's adventure, catching up on family news and reminiscing about their time in service to our country.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy's annual Sporting Circle Veteran's Hunt was about to get underway. Twenty veterans who served in the armed forces – many of whom saw combat in nearly every American war since World War II – spent the morning hunting pheasants in the open fields of Grand Valley Hunting Preserve, a 1,000-acre property the Land Conservancy owns and operates in Ashtabula County. Pheasants were then dressed and sent home with the participants after a lunch provided by the local Cortland Moose Lodge. The Land Conservancy partnered with the Northeast Ohio Foundation for Patriotism, a nonprofit that supports local military members and their families, to bring the veterans out for the hunt. The morning kicked off with an impressive skydiving demonstration from

Cleveland Skydiving Center, with 10 skydivers dropping in on the field.

"I really enjoyed spending time with our heroes and thanking them for their service and sacrifice. It was a great chance to hear some of their stories while watching them recreate and hunt on the preserve."

-U.S. Representative Bill Johnson



The Sporting Circle program provides exceptional experiences and expanded opportunities to hunters and anglers of all levels throughout northeast Ohio. We offer professionally guided outings for new hunters and anglers at many of our private preserves across northern Ohio. These unique events that take place on conserved Land

Conservancy properties connect members, donors, sponsors, and friends to a new conservation experience. The Veteran's Hunt is one of many fishing and hunting expeditions we lead throughout the year.

"For me to see my kids enjoying the outdoors the way I enjoyed them is just tremendous," said Cameron Miele, a Trustee for the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "The Sporting Circle is a great way to promote being outside, to be a part of the land. To see these veterans just have a fun day is such a special thing." The families of Cameron Miele and Scott Mawaka provided funding for this event, which meant that all the veterans participated for free.

A few days after the Land Conservancy hosted the Veteran's Hunt, we were proud to host a hunt for elected officials at the Preserve. Congressman Tim Ryan, State Senator Michael Rulli, State Representative Gil Blair, and State Representative Sean O'Brien formed the bipartisan hunting party. Politics were put on hold as the four elected officials joked and laughed together; some slight teasing may have happened about each other's aim, but overall it was another great experience.

"Northeast Ohio is fortunate to have elected representation that works tirelessly on behalf of the conservation community,"

said Steven Berk, Western Reserve Land Conservancy's director of public policy. "Their efforts ensure this region will continue to offer unrivaled outdoor recreation opportunities for every Ohioan." Sen. Rulli and Sen. O'Brien, who both chair the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus, spread the positive impacts of outdoor sporting and recreation.

"The Sporting Circle is the program where our work to preserve special landscapes in Ohio meets the valuable use they provide," Rich Cochran, president and CEO of Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "To be able to provide memorable experiences for our nation's veterans, our elected officials, and our friends and families on properties we helped preserve for future generations is truly a blessing."

