



## **Update and information on philanthropic impact at Warner Parks**

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Individuals, foundations and companies who partner with Friends of Warner Parks are doing their part to take care of one of Nashville's greatest assets. There are over a million trees in Warner Parks. None of them grow money. It's a big job to care for nearly 3,200 acres of natural area parkland! Philanthropic support to Friends of Warner Parks goes directly toward improvements, stewardship, and programs that keep this treasured resource safe and beautiful for posterity.

Below, please find an update on the impact of the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation's contribution to Friends of Warner Parks. We are grateful for the long-term partnership of the Foundation that allows us to protect and preserve Warner Parks and provide environmental education programs that reach tens of thousands of children each year.

### **Pathway to the Future**

Well over a million people visit and use Warner Parks each year. A Strategic Plan from 2014-2019 outlines the priorities of Friends of Warner Parks in partnership with Metro Parks and Recreation and park users. This fall, a Strategic Planning Task Force of 20 individuals will be convening to update and plan for 2019 – 2023. As Nashville grows, use of Warner Parks will grow proportionally. Protected portions of the Parks are already being "loved to death" by growing numbers of visitors and the effect of increased use will have negative impact on the natural resources if not managed well. These are the Priorities of Friends of Warner Parks current Strategic Plan.

#### **Priority One:**

Enhance the Parks through planned improvement. Friends of Warner Parks will work collaboratively with Metro Parks Planning Division and Resource Managers to review and approve plans that ensure Warner Parks remains a quality nature and recreation destination through improvements to the parks facilities and features. Included in this review will be and update to the existing master plans and management plans.

#### **Priority Two:**

Support the Nature Center programs, staff and services based on the recommendations by the Association of Nature Center Administrator's. In partnership with the Warner Parks Nature Center, Friends of Warner Parks will strive to nurture wildlife and nature enthusiasts through recreational and educational experiences. The Nature Center will position itself to be seen as the regional leader and expert in all environmental issues.

#### **Priority Three:**

Ensure financial advocacy to support park maintenance, preservation and the enhancement of programs, facilities and visitor experiences. Friends of Warner Parks will develop initiatives to support and advocate for the Parks development, preservation, maintenance, programs/activities and staffing that will enhance Park experiences.

## **Programs and Preservation**

### **Trail Maintenance**

The Warner Parks' trails and grounds are traversed by over one million visitors and horses annually. Wear and tear must be mitigated to preserve the Parks for posterity. As Nashville grows and its residents are encouraged to adopt healthy habits in the outdoors, maintaining the Parks and trails takes more effort and becomes more vital to the quality of life in our city.

The S.W.E.A.T. (Special Work Education And Trails) program was launched in 1990 by Friends of Warner Parks under the guidance of Metro Parks. This work-earn-learn summer program was modeled after Youth Conservation Corps, with a purpose of engaging young people in preserving and enhancing the Warner Parks while fostering respect for the natural world and a professional work ethic.

The S.W.E.A.T. team consists of teens and young adults, as culturally and economically diverse as possible, hired to work in the Warner Parks each summer. Their projects included trail improvements; landscape, tree and garden care; structural and bridge repairs; and other park improvements. Each summer, these dedicated team members receive field experience, education, and character development that will have long-term benefits on their careers.

Exposure to environmental concerns and solutions is inherent in the S.W.E.A.T. program, and many alumni have gone on to use what they've learned from S.W.E.A.T. in fields like education, conservation, recreation, among others, benefiting the communities in which they serve.

With help from the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation, Friends of Warner Parks was able to invest over \$75,000 in trail maintenance last year through S.W.E.A.T. and volunteer initiatives. Reduction in Parks maintenance funding have been offset through the work of Friends of Warner Parks' volunteers and the S.W.E.A.T. team, meaning the trails and amenities are kept in safe and working condition when they may not otherwise be attended to.

### **Environmental Education**

Friends of Warner Parks appreciates support from the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation that supports environmental education programming at the Warner Park Nature Center. The Nature Center is a public resource that reaches over 100,000 individuals a year. Part of the Friends of Warner Parks mission is to aid the Nature Center in its education and outreach programs offered free of charge.

A wide variety of programs at the Warner Park Nature Center offer all ages a chance to learn about the history and ecology of the Parks and the region, and discover ways to live healthier and lighter on the Earth. During the school year, local schools utilize the Warner Park Nature Center for outdoor education. Younger children discover the wonders of nature and learn about science basics such as life cycles, ecosystems and animal habitats. Middle and high school students are immersed into a living laboratory for biology, ecology and geology studies. As teachers and their resources become more strained, the Warner Park Nature Center's role in education within the mid-state becomes increasingly vital.

With help from the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation, Friends of Warner Parks granted over \$135,000 of financial support for the Warner Park Nature Center's environmental education programs.



## Outdoor Experiences for Urban Youth

2018 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of People Exploring Nature (PEN Pals), a program created by Metro Parks of Nashville in partnership with Friends of Warner Parks to improve the quality of life and promote positive self-esteem in the youth of Nashville's inner-city through environmental education, outdoor adventure and recreation activities.

PEN Pals was developed to reach out to youth who lack direct access to traditional environmental education and outdoor recreation programs. Since 1988 over 7,300 children between 8 and 13 years of age have participated in PEN Pals. This overnight summer camp experience helps kids explore nature, become more comfortable with an unfamiliar environment, learn outdoor living skills, and develop new interpersonal and relationship skills while forging new friendships with peers and adult mentors. "Sleeping in a tent, splashing in the river, gazing at the stars, wondering about coyotes, watching a red-tailed hawk catch and eat it's dinner, listening to the song of a wood thrush all day and the barred owls at night... every child deserves these opportunities," says Sandy Bivens, PEN Pals founder.

The PEN Pals program has accrued a history of successes and has received a variety of awards and recognitions, including the Tennessee Parks and Recreation Association Four-Star Award and the TRPA Maynard Glenn Award for staff development and supervision of the most outstanding program in the state. It is one of the most innovative and long-lived environmental education programs in Tennessee, engaging deserving youth from economically disadvantaged families to bring urban youth to nature.

Some of the philanthropic support from the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation provided full scholarships to help ensure that every child, regardless of economic situation, has a quality summer camp experience at Warner Parks. With your support, we continue to breaking down barriers to getting youth outdoors and experiencing the natural magic that is right here in our city. We are deeply grateful for the investment the Volunteer State Horsemen's Foundation made in these kids.

### **For additional information or to ask questions, please contact:**

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*Friends of Warner Parks is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to the preservation, protection and stewardship of Warner Parks. It works to protect the natural and historical integrity of the area by supporting recreational activities, maintaining and enhancing its features and promoting programs that inspire appreciation and conservation of the Parks.*

