

# Wissahickon

A large, multi-story stone building with a wrap-around porch and a circular fountain with a statue in the foreground. The building has a prominent gable and a turret. The fountain is in the foreground, and the statue is a nude female figure. The background shows a clear blue sky and some greenery.

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HISTORIC HALL**

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## Publisher

Daralyse Lyons

## Editor

Wendy Rosenfield

## Sales and Marketing Manager

Leisha Shaffer

## Advertising Representatives

Leslie Cerf

Diane Lauro

George Ward

## Production Manager

Blaise Brugger

## Advertising Design

Hannah Pilling

Amy Jacoby

## Contributors

Buffy Gorrilla

Kristin Holmes

Clark Perks

Carla Robinson

Wendy Rosenfield

Susan Schaefer

Lucy Tobier

## Photography

Courtney Haldeman

Brian Nelson

Clark Perks

Carla Robinson

Richard Wiener

## Design Consultant

Richard Stein

## On the Cover

Woodmere's newly renovated

Maguire Hall is set to open

to the public on November 1.

Photo courtesy of Woodmere.



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# From the editor

When I was an elementary student at what was then called the Springside School for Girls, our teacher (Mrs. Williams? It's been a while.) introduced the class to a science unit about trees. With the glorious Wissahickon Valley as our laboratory, we were told to find various living examples, identify them by their habitat, leaf or needle shape, and determine whether they were deciduous or evergreen.

Armed with a small — maybe 5"x3" — book called "Master Tree Finder: A Manual for the Identification of Trees by Their Leaves," by May Thielgaard Watts, we set out along the creek and into the woodlands. Like tiny botany-minded Nancy Drews, we followed the book's clues until we solved the case.

Pick a specimen, examine its leaf. "If the leaves or buds grow opposite, go below. ... If the leaves or buds grow alternately, go to page 21." Are the leaves lobed? Are the lobes V shaped? Veined, coarsely toothed? You might have yourself a Mountain Maple (*Acer spicatum*)!

How do I remember any of this? Because I loved that unit so much I kept the book; those sense memories have lasted a lifetime.

Mix the excitement of a new school year with the spongy bounce of the forest's umber carpet, the musty scent of humus, and the texture of gritty creekside sediment on fingertips. A few were even lucky enough to bring back a crumbly, sheer sheet of mica passed around like treasure.

That's what it's like to experience autumn along the Wissahickon.

## The best season

In the offices of the Chestnut Hill Local, publisher of Wissahickon magazine, it's universally agreed autumn is the best season.

At Woodmere, fall brings the cherished tradition of its architect-designed straw maze. But this year also marks the opening of its brand-new Frances M. Maguire Hall for Art and Education. As reporter Buffy Gorrilla learned, it's a space certain to cement the museum's place among the region's must-see cultural sites.

To the Forbidden Drive walkers profiled in Kristin Holmes' story, fall means another year of joining together in the early mornings to watch the leaves change color and fall beneath their feet.

To Germantown's unique bookshop and cafe, Uncle Bobbie's, Carla Robinson discovered this fall means an eye toward the future with the goal of expansion and a skyrocketing national profile, thanks to boldface book launch partners such as Dawn Staley and Kamala Harris.

## Shopping opportunity

For shoppers along the Avenue, it means the opportunity to get cozy with leaf-peeping colorways, from nut-brown men's leather boots handmade in the U.S.A. to throw pillows from India accented in saffron and teal. Ask a shop owner their favorite in-store seasonal item and the answer will likely surprise and delight.

To Laurel Hill's visitors, it means the return of "spooky season" and the Market of the Macabre. The site's residents — as far as we can tell — remain still, but reporter Clark Perks listened as their monuments spoke volumes on their behalf.

Philadelphia's performance lovers know that when Labor Day ends, Fringe begins. This year, the city's northwest gets a bigger share of the excitement than ever before with an expansion of programs at its Circus Campus. Chestnut Hill Local summer intern Lucy Tobier (Swarthmore College) went behind the scenes to do some clowning around and fact finding.

Finally, autumn is a great time to hit the road and head for the hills. It's harvest time, and as writer Susan Schaefer saw firsthand, the Lebanon Valley offers some of the prettiest landscapes, richest history, and finest produce around.

We hope this issue of the magazine takes you on a journey through places and people you know and love, and introduces you to some you'd like to know better. In this, nature's (arguably) best season, the Chestnut Hill Local and the editors and writers of this magazine wish you the joy of discovery and exploration — much like what I experienced on the banks of the Wissahickon all those years ago.

Wendy Rosenfield



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# A new beginning for a beloved landmark

Twice a day, every day, Sister Karen Dietrich drives past St. Michael's at 9001 Germantown Ave. on her commute to and from work. Though she hasn't stepped inside for years, her anticipation is growing for its latest incarnation: a new annex for Woodmere's 20th- and 21st-century art collection, set to open this fall.





By **BUFFY GORRILLA**

Photo courtesy of Woodmere

Sister Dietrich spent a lot of time inside, exploring its halls, the chapel, and the expansive grounds.

But St. Michael's hasn't always been St. Michael's. The building has been many things to many people in the surrounding communities. Built in 1852, the same year "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was published and Franklin Pierce was elected president, it was a beautiful summer retreat during the Gilded Age, passing through the hands of some notable industrial magnates.

Metals merchant William Henry Trotter had the house built for his lovely new bride, Maria Louisa. In 1868, it was owned by steam locomotive pioneer Henry Latimer Norris, and later, in 1884, sugar baron Alfred Craven Harrison became the owner.

In 1924, real estate developer Judson Zane divided the estate, selling five acres for residential development. The remaining house and land found a new purpose when the Sisters of Saint Joseph, a kind and dedicated French religious group active in Philadelphia since 1847, acquired it. They lovingly renamed the property St. Michael's Hall.

The exterior of the original Gothic revival mansion has remained intact, as the interior evolved to meet the needs of the space, changing it from a school to a dormitory. "There were a lot of jerry-built little rooms," Dietrich says. "With plywood walls going up to accommodate college students." But the beautiful original woodwork and stonework were preserved.

The final iteration of St. Michael's as a convent was a home to faculty sisters who taught at Chestnut Hill College. When the sisters moved into St. Michael's after its time as a student dorm, Dietrich remembers, "there was a joy that it was becoming a true convent again."

Sister Mary Jo Larkin, a volunteer architect now at Mt. Saint Joseph Convent, remembers some of the building's fascinating details, such as hidden storage nooks behind the decorative carvings. "When you hit them, they opened," Larkin says, speculating that the nooks might have stored hunting rifles or booze during Prohibition.

## Being a 'dear neighbor'

Time began to wear on the grand old building and its aging occupants. The sisters were getting older. "The number of sisters living at St. Michael's was dwindling," Dietrich explains. The building's "very uneven" layout, including steps up, corners, and a kitchen in the basement accessed by a dumbwaiter, presented safety concerns for those with limited mobility.

The decision to relocate the remaining sisters was made with great care. By autumn 2019, St. Michael's stood empty. "And we know it's not good to have an empty building because it



On previous page: The late afternoon sun highlights the play of light and shadow at the front of Maguire Hall.

knows it's empty and it starts to deteriorate," Dietrich says.

The question then became, what next? The Sisters of St. Joseph, as its owners, had complete discretion over the building's destiny. They were determined to avoid turning to a generic developer. Their land ethic, a core tenet of their order, guided their thinking. "We had

talks about caring for the earth, the watershed, green space, and the old trees," explained Dietrich, who was on the leadership team overseeing the sale of St. Michael's.

Another guiding principle for the Sisters of St. Joseph is the concept of always trying to be a "dear neighbor." This philosophy informed their approach to the sale. The sisters asked

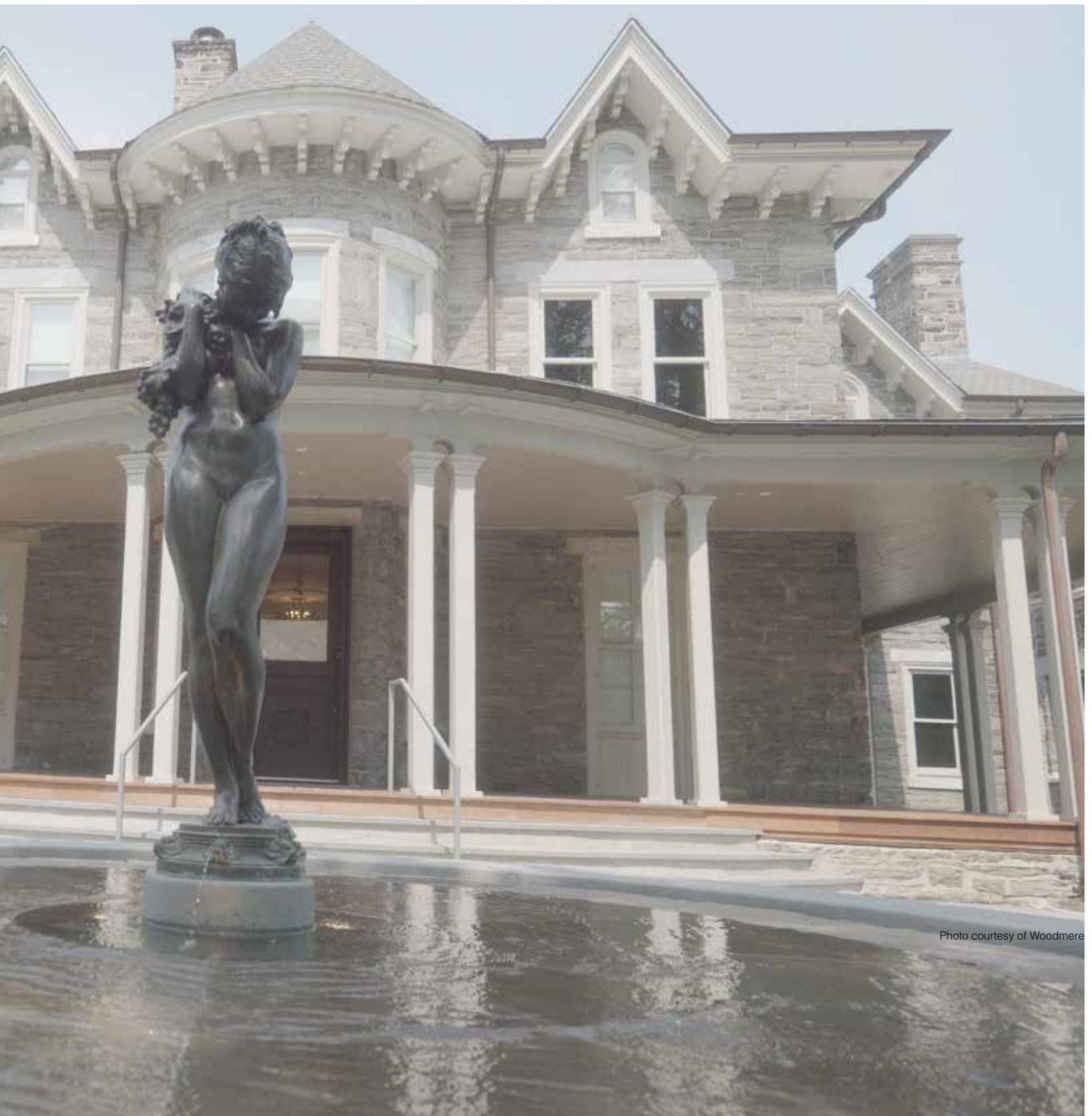


Photo courtesy of Woodmere

Photo courtesy of Woodmere

*Above, a fountain and sculpture grace the entrance of the newly restored landmark.*

the neighbors, “What do you think we should do?” This question led to some lively discussions among neighbors about pooling resources to purchase the property, perhaps converting it into two luxury apartments while preserving the exterior and as much of the interior as possible. However, the costs and challenges of such a conversion quickly became apparent,

making it untenable.

The sisters were acutely aware of the impact on their neighbors. The sale of a large plot of land could be upsetting. “We were very concerned about their well being,” Larkin said. The motive was not simply to sell off the site, but to place it in the hands of “another trusted owner, someone who would

care for it for a period of time as we did.” The goal was a stewardship model, not a quick transaction.

Enter William Valerio, Woodmere’s director and CEO. Like Dietrich, Valerio drove past the convent almost daily. After all, St. Michael’s was just 72 steps from Woodmere. In 2020, with the pandemic swirling, Valerio



Photo courtesy of Woodmere

Murals by Violet Oakley, including “Man and Science, above, will be featured in the new galleries at Maguire Hall.

visited the site.

Dietrich recalls the initial tour with Valerio. “He loved it. Like, there’s nothing not to love, right? But he could immediately see, well, you just take that down, and the second floor beautifully mirrors the first floor.” Architectural symmetry, characteristic of the era, meant that once the temporary walls were gone, the expansive rooms on both floors would be perfectly suited for an art museum.

Valerio was convinced St. Michael’s could be the perfect extension of Woodmere. The repurposed mansion offered a brilliant fix for the museum’s ongoing problem: how to show off its ever-expanding collection of over 11,000 artworks and make it easily available to scholars, students, and other visitors. Valerio’s idea was to keep the estate intact, protect the land, and build it into a cultural hub right in Chestnut Hill.

## All the pieces in place

A \$10 million donation from the Maguire Foundation, the largest in the museum’s history, funded the renovation and programming of the building, which was renamed the Frances M. Maguire Hall for Art and Education. The foundation invests in education, arts, and humanities.

All the pieces fell into place to transform St. Michael’s and all the memories stored within its walls into a new space pulsing with art, culture, and new memories.

Architect Jeff Krieger’s office is next to Killian’s Hardware in Chestnut Hill, and like Dietrich and Valerio, he drove by the property

many times. (Are you sensing a theme here?)

Woodmere, already acquainted with Krieger + Associates Architects, enlisted the group as local architects of the project team, further strengthened by New York-based Matthew Baird Architects, who led the design. Krieger expressed the importance of the St. Michael’s acquisition. “To me, that was the most exciting thing as a local resident, to have someone like Woodmere step in with a commitment to renovate the building and keep it as a public resource, and the grounds as well,” he said.

“If architects have a superpower, it’s supposed to be imagining that which doesn’t exist in the built environment,” Krieger explained. As the local architects, Krieger + Associates used their superpowers to navigate the labyrinthine world of zoning and building-code variances, addressing everything from the property’s residential designation to a critical need for accessibility in the multi-level structure.

## Meeting design challenges

Reflecting on the design complexities, Krieger emphasized, “The biggest design challenge was just to make it accessible and to make it warm and inviting and an appropriate series of rooms for the artwork in Woodmere’s collection to be displayed.”

One of the spaces Krieger is most proud of is the creation of a purpose-built domed room. There, in the newly renovated Maguire Hall, you’ll find a special highlight dedicated to Violet Oakley and her murals from “The Build-

ing of the House of Wisdom.” The gallery is thoughtfully designed to echo its original installation in banker Charlton Yarnall’s Philadelphia mansion at 17th and Locust Streets. Its warm, glowing ceiling-light box beautifully recalls the home’s lost stained-glass skylight.

Additionally, a state-of-the-art jewelry vault was constructed, highlighting the museum’s commitment to safeguarding its diverse collections. The museum is cementing its role as a major cultural magnet. And remember those temporary plywood partitions built to accommodate the students? “The nice thing was, they weren’t put up super well,” Krieger said, making their demolition one of the “easier” parts of the restoration.

Krieger can’t wait for the big reveal. “I think [the public is] going to be amazed at what the design team, the landscape architects, Bill Valerio, and his staff were able to do, to turn this cottage-slash-convent into an art museum for Woodmere’s display of 20th- and 21st-century regional art.”

With an opening planned for early November, you can almost picture the crew of workers plowing through a last-minute punch list, to ensure everything is perfectly in place to welcome visitors to the new Frances M. Maguire Hall for Art and Education.

The official public opening is Nov. 1, and the date is already in Sister Dietrich’s calendar. However, she said, she’d love a sneak peek. “Some of the sisters said that, if we could go inside before it really opens, especially if the sisters who had lived there could go see it, that would be a thrill.” ■

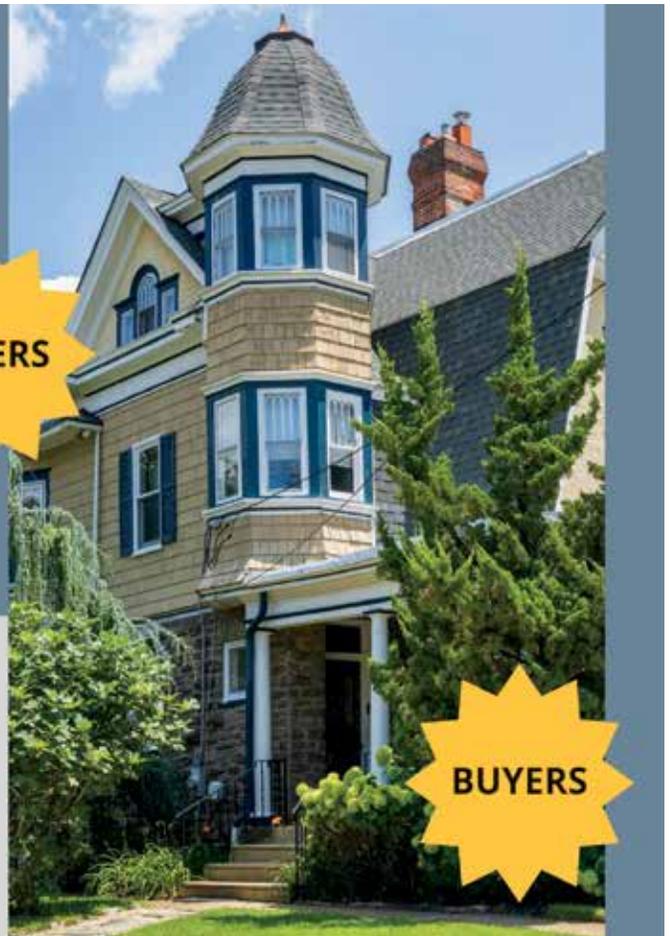


Snapshots of Chestnut Hill College students at what was then called St. Michael Hall ca. 1954. At top left, three women pose outside. Other photos were taken inside dorm rooms in the building.

Photos by Marguerite Zuccarello

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# Miles and memories: How Wissahickon Park created bonds that last a lifetime

At first, Carlotta Fareira and Harrison Tate Jr. passed each other with only a nod of recognition as they navigated Forbidden Drive in the early morning hours.





By KRISTIN HOLMES

**F**areira ran in Wissahickon Valley Park as a brief escape from a troubled marriage and the crush of raising two children. Tate, 15 years younger, walked the trail as a way to exhale when the middle school students he taught acted like middle schoolers.

“One day, I just said hello,” said Tate, of Roxborough. That greeting occurred more than 42 years ago and has since led to a friendship cemented by a love of the Wissahickon. Their connection multiplied as well, and these days, Fareira, now 92, and Tate, 77, aren’t the only ones walking together.

For a group of people who have traversed Wissahickon Valley Park together for decades, the 2,000-acre expanse that winds through Northwest Philadelphia is an elixir. A walk along the path, shaded by an arch of chestnut oak trees, with the sound of crickets and the crunch of sneakers on gravel, can act as both a salve and a soundtrack for the affirmation of friendship.

## 6 a.m. or 9 a.m.

In the 42 years since Tate and Fareira have walked together, two groups of friends who walk have formed. One group of roughly six people sets out at 6 a.m., the other, about the same number, at 9 a.m. Both meet at the 175-year-old historic Valley Green Inn approximately five-days a week.

“We hardly knew each other’s names at first; I recognized them by their gait,” said Fareira, a retired teacher from Mt. Airy. “We’d just say ‘Hi,’ and keep going, but eventually we knew their names and learned a little about them and their families. Then, it became a real community who cared about each other.”

The friends who walk worked as teachers, doctors, police officers, real estate agents, contractors, and nurses. Some were skilled runners. Others just strolled. They have maintained their Wissahickon connection through decades marked by marriages, divorces, births, and deaths.

Fareira prefers the cooler temperatures at 6 a.m. On any given day, Tate, retired letter carrier Willie Johnson, dentist Dr. John King, and nurse Cheryl Preston, the “baby” of a group mostly in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, walk south toward the two-mile turning point in almost any weather. The group rules out storms or packed and icy snow, but any other day above 20 degrees is usually a go.

“In the winter it’s so tranquil. There’s nobody here, and it becomes your place,” said Roger Jones, who walks with the 9 a.m. group. “When you see the changes of the seasons, it’s a beautiful place to be.”

On a summer morning in July, Fareira stopped for a pre-walk ritual. She picked up trash along the path near the inn. Soon, John-



Photos by Brian Nelson

*On previous page: Friends Willie Johnson, Harrison Tate Jr., Carlotta Fareira, Cheryl Preston, and Tom King on Forbidden Drive during their regular weekday walk in July.*

*Above: Joe Jamison greets Kathryn Rapp during a walk with Bruce Ross (in black) and Al Walker.*

*At left: John Green (left), a bird enthusiast; Jamison (center) and Calvin Jones look at a photo during a morning walk.*



son arrived wearing his vintage yellow-and-black tank top. A retired letter carrier, he was a member of the New Freedom Striders, a former Northwest Philadelphia-based track club founded in the 1970s. The team’s name is emblazoned in black on Johnson’s shirt.

“We ran every day after work,” said Johnson, 82, of Mt. Airy. “During the week, we would meet at the [inn] and do at least 10 miles. Don’t ask me how I did it.”

The Striders were founded to dispel any notion that Black athletes were just sprinters and couldn’t run long distances, said Jones, who also ran with the club. Their members ran marathons and half-marathons throughout the region.

“We were kind of feared,” Jones said of the Striders. “They’d see the yellow-and-black uniform; they’d know the competition was here.”

Now, decades later, Jones walks. On a recent morning, battling a bad back rubbed with

Icy Hot, Jones walked slowly, a bit bent over. Eventually, he stopped to return to his car, as the rest of that day’s 9 a.m. group — Calvin Jones, Al Walker, Joe Jamison, and Bruce Ross — went on their usual route north toward Thomas Road.

## The topic of conversation

As they walked, the group passed important Wissahickon Park landmarks, including “the chief,” the statue of Teedyuscung, a leader of the Lenni-Lenape Nation that occupied the land before settlers immigrated. The walkers peered down a ridge to check out a colorful bird near the creek. A few moments later, a deer sprinted across the road.

The friends were greeted periodically by park regulars who walk, run, and ride past. Kathryn Rapp of Springfield Township, who runs eight to 10 miles a day, slowed down to

chat. Conversations can be about anything. Current events, personal challenges, the Eagles and Phillies all get an airing in the park.

“On top of the conversation, and the social uplift and support, this has really been something we cherish so much that we are hard pressed to cut it loose,” Ross said.

## Coach with a Hart

A retired energy tech at PECO, Ross usually walks with Jones, a retired physical education teacher at George Washington High School. Several years ago, Jones, of Wyncote, was walking the Wissahickon when his cellphone notifications blew up. At the time, the walking group followed a rule: No phones allowed. The mornings were their free time together in the valley. But Jones sneaked a look at a series of texts.

Comedian Kevin Hart had mentioned Jones during an interview on “Good Morning America.” The retired teacher coached Hart in basketball when the comedian was a student at George Washington. On the morning show, Hart called Jones an important father figure in his life. Jones’ friends called to let him know.

A player on the Thomas Edison basketball team that won a 1969 city championship, Jones is only one of the walkers who achieved big things in their athletic career. King, who didn’t start running until he was in his 60s,

has completed four Boston Marathons. Walker was a star player for legendary Temple coach John Chaney when he coached at Simon Gratz High School. Jamison, a retired correction officer who still runs regularly, played basketball in local semipro leagues.

But no matter how fast or far an athlete runs, eventually aging catches up.

## Time marches on

Walker, of Roxborough, was running three miles a day until he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and kidney disease. “My doctors suggested I walk instead of run,” he said.

On a winter day several years ago, Johnson was hit with a spell of vertigo so severe he fell to the ground. Alone on a stretch of Forbidden Drive at 6 a.m., he called friend and fellow walker Tom King, who drove down from his home in Springfield Township, picked Johnson up, and took him to Chestnut Hill Hospital.

“That’s when I found out I had AFib [atrial fibrillation],” Johnson said. “I found out I wasn’t invincible, but I’m back on the trail.”

All have watched as friends, former regulars on the morning walk, got slower and eventually didn’t return. Harold “Giggles” Freeman, a retired discipline officer for the school district, walked alternately with the 6 a.m. and

9 a.m. group. Sometimes he did both in one day. A man his wife Diane described as “funny, upbeat, and positive,” Freeman would return home from his morning walks and talk about an unusual bird he spied or the ducks in a pond.

Several years ago, he was diagnosed with colon cancer.

During his treatment, Freeman, of Springfield Township, navigated Forbidden Drive’s gravel path with walking sticks, as a medical pack pumped chemotherapy drugs into his body. “Once the doctor told him in August [of 2024] that he wasn’t going to live but a few more months, he still went out [to the Wissahickon] until late September,” Diane said.

Harold Freeman died in January. His walking buddies sat in pews at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Spring House for the funeral services, or watched online. “That’s the hurting part. It brings water to my eyes,” Talmadge “Tally” Tippett, of the 9 a.m. group, said. “I love those brothers.”

After the loss of a friend, the walkers return to the valley. They strive to leave sadness in the dust, at least for a few moments.

“We talk about the memories. We celebrate their life,” Jones said. “We talk about some of the crazy things they did, and laugh about when we go, what people will say about us. It’s not a downer. It’s a celebration, because we are from the valley.” ■

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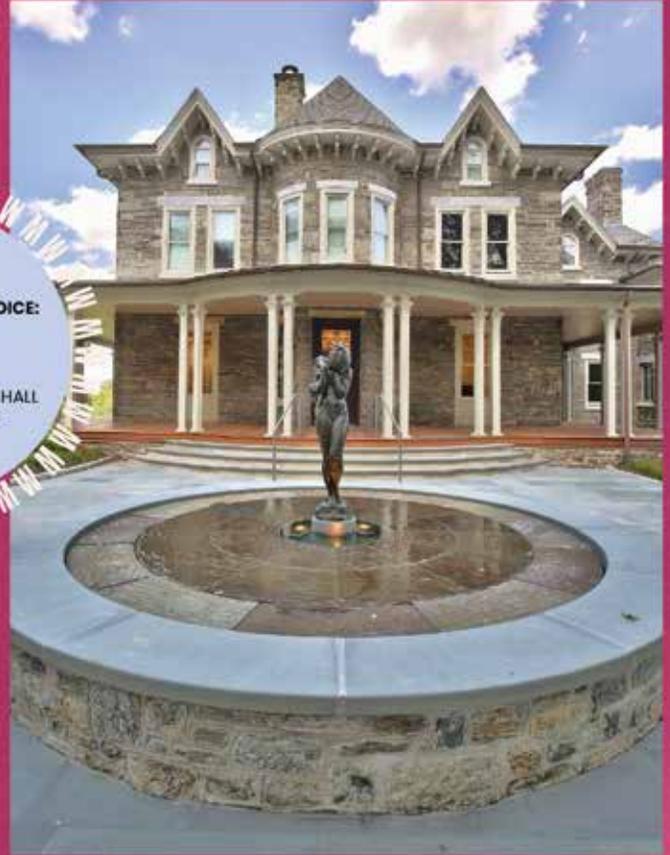
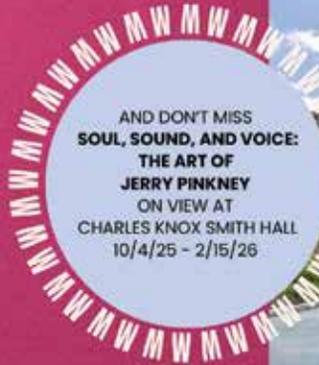
The advertisement features a large photograph of a historic stone building with a gabled roof and multiple chimneys, surrounded by lush greenery. Two smaller inset images show modern interior renovations: one of a bright kitchen with white cabinetry and a red chair, and another of a bright bathroom with white walls and a window seat. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# FRANCES M. MAGUIRE HALL

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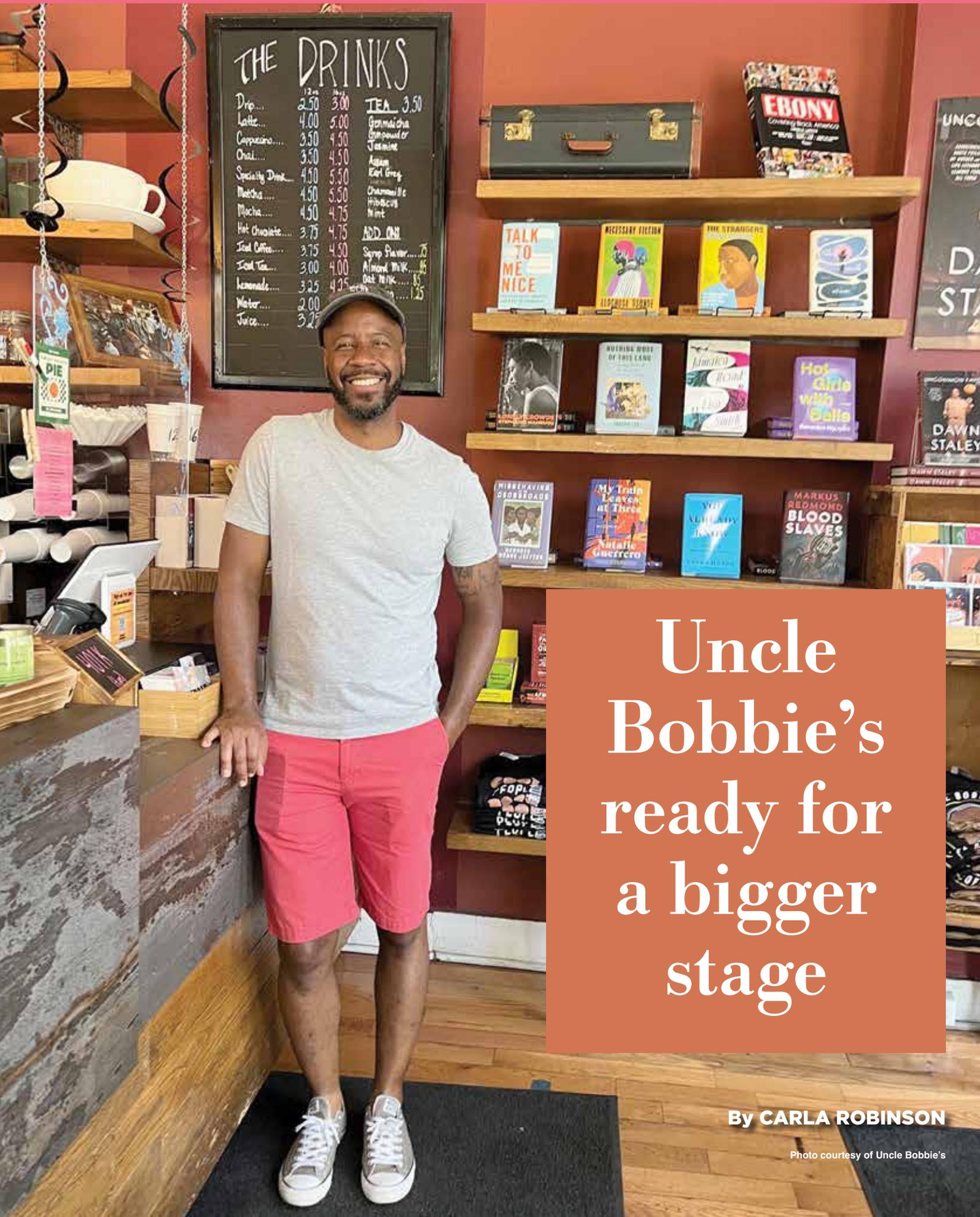
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Cappuccino	3.50	4.50
Orzo	3.50	4.50
Specialty Drink	4.50	5.50
Matcha	4.50	5.50
Mocha	4.50	4.75
Hot Chocolate	3.75	4.75
Soil Coffee	3.75	4.50
Soil Tea	3.00	4.00
Lemonade	3.25	4.25
Water	2.00	
Juice	3.25	
TEA	3.50	
Genmaicha		
Symposium or		
Jasmine		
Asian Earl Grey		
Chamomile		
Hibiscus		
Mint		
ADD-ONS		
Syrup Flavor	.25	
Almond Milk	.45	
Oat Milk	.85	
	1.25	

Uncle Bobbie's ready for a bigger stage

By CARLA ROBINSON

Photo courtesy of Uncle Bobbie's

When Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson needed a partner to help launch her 2024 memoir, “Lovely One,” she chose Uncle Bobbie’s Coffee & Books in the heart of historic Germantown. In a remarkable feat for a small, independent bookstore, the discussion and book signing that followed at Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church in Cedarbrook sold 4,000 tickets and became one of the most successful stops on Jackson’s national tour.

“She is someone who will exist in history textbooks,” said Uncle Bobbie’s General Manager Justin Moore. He’s no stranger to celebrity guests — including recent appearances by national championship basketball coach Dawn Staley, author Ta-Nehisi Coates, and talk show host Charlemagne Tha God. “It was an honor that her team and the publisher trusted us with such a large event.”

That trust reflects something founder Marc Lamont Hill never quite anticipated when he opened Uncle Bobbie’s in November 2017. Eight years later, his dream has grown into a regional destination that can no longer be contained within a single storefront. Moore says they’re close to selecting a new and larger location — and hopes to make an announcement this fall.

## A community built on quality

Hill named the store after his late uncle, Bobbie Lee Hill, a World War II veteran who introduced young Marc to Black literature. Hill, an activist, controversial political commentator, and professor of urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, had been selling books since his teens, and watched as the number of Black-owned bookstores in the U.S. declined from hundreds to just 54. When he first opened Uncle Bobbie’s, Hill told the Philadelphia Tribune he wanted to “make it 55 and create something that we needed.”

From the beginning, Hill created Uncle Bobbie’s to deliver a quality experience. This commitment shows up everywhere, from the choice of La Colombe coffee beans to the store’s interior design.

“One of the things Marc is always saying is ‘Black people deserve nice things too,’” Moore said. “We could have found a cheaper bean, and maybe some folks wouldn’t even notice. But Marc was very clear that we wanted to bring the same level of quality to Germantown that you can get anywhere else downtown.”

That thinking shapes the store’s choice of books — distinct offerings that include focus on the Black experience, and a children’s section filled with stories about Black and brown characters.

“If you pick up a book on the shelf, you



Photo courtesy of

know it went through a level of vetting. It’s going to be good,” Moore noted. “And for parents to be able to bring their kids in, and see shelves full of people who look like them — I don’t know how you can put a price on something like that.”

While recent reports suggest the percentage of Black authors has begun to climb in an industry historically dominated by whites, Moore said there’s still a “huge void for Black voices and Black authors.” He counters this lack of inclusion by featuring a Black author every week, regardless of genre. He also insists events remain free to attend.

“We’re part of a community of people who, in many instances, might not have the means to afford a high-priced ticket for a celebrity event,” he said. “Here, you can be in the room with people you really admire — and if you can buy the book, get a signed copy.”

## Balancing mission with business

Uncle Bobbie’s mission means that the

business, a for-profit enterprise, is built around the needs of the community. And that presents challenges.

“The priority was to give Germantown, which has suffered from a lack of investment for so long, something nice,” Moore said. “But that comes with costs. We’ve been broken into 12 times since we opened. And we know that if we went further up the Avenue into Chestnut Hill, it’s less likely that we would have to deal with that.”

It also means they want to keep prices low — while paying their 16-member staff a competitive wage.

But that mission is also a big reason the business thrives. Uncle Bobbie’s has expanded well beyond its neighborhood roots, drawing customers from throughout the region, and beyond. It has more than 76,000 Instagram followers and its online business, supported by a robust social media presence and author connections, regularly fills orders nationwide.

“We’ve tracked the data over the years, and a considerable amount of our customers are ac-



Photo by Carla Robinson

Photo on page 19: General Manager Justin Moore takes great pride in the carefully curated selection of reading material at Uncle Bobbie's. At left: Dawn Staley is one of many high-profile authors who have appeared at Uncle Bobbie's events. Above: The cafe has become a neighborhood gathering place.

f Uncle Bobbie's

tually coming from well beyond the neighborhood," Moore says.

The value of this reach became clear during COVID-19, when the forced closure prompted Moore to launch a \$50,000 GoFundMe campaign to keep the store afloat — and wound up raising almost \$100,000.

"We got donations from all over the country," Moore said. "We're fortunate to be able to have an impact with a lot of people in a lot of different places."

## The focus pays off

The store's approach clearly works. In April 2018, two Black men were arrested at a Philadelphia Starbucks because they sat down to wait for a meeting without buying anything. The next day customers came from all over the region to flood Uncle Bobbie's in a show of support for the Black-owned business, making it one of their biggest nonholiday sales days ever.

"That was one incident, but it was indica-

tive of the experience of Black people in this country," Moore said. "Uncle Bobbie's exists, in part, to be a space where Black people know they are not going to be criminalized."

Uncle Bobbie's mission also resonates with regular customers.

"It's just really nice, and positive — they've created a real community here," said Dalaney Fitzgerald, a licensed behavioral therapist from Elkins Park.

Monique Major, who lives in West Oak Lane, knows it as "a great place to come and work."

Angela Val, president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia, who also shops at the store, says she feels "personally grateful" for it. "That's not just because it raises the profile of our city, but because it embraces a diversity of voices with its focus on Black culture, literature, and excellence, and it does so in a way that doesn't exclude anyone.

"The fact that Ketanji Brown Jackson sold 4,000 tickets is incredible. I'm so proud to be able to say that. Bookstores are so important to

our democracy — now more than ever — and I love that this one is in Germantown."

Leo Dillinger, executive director of the Germantown United Community Development Corp., appreciates that the store draws people who might not otherwise visit the neighborhood.

"It's definitely a destination business," Dillinger said. "The excellence of everything they do — from the coffee itself, to the curated selection of books, to the guests they are able to host — has really been an economic boon to Germantown, and to the city as a whole."

Even better, Dillinger said, Uncle Bobbie's is an inspiration for other would-be entrepreneurs considering a business in Germantown — the city's 12th poorest neighborhood, according to census data.

"They've proved that, by offering something people really want and respond to, you can be very successful opening a high-standard business in this neighborhood," he said.

The buzz even reached the big screen in December, when a character in Netflix's drama series "The Madness" sported an Uncle Bobbie's T-shirt in the show's fourth episode — a moment the store celebrated on social media as "Uncle Bobbie's goes Hollywood."

## Planning for expansion

With their current lease expiring in May, Moore says staying in Germantown "is a priority." The store has launched an \$18,000 capital campaign on GoFundMe. By the end of August, they raised \$2,451, mostly in donations under \$25.

"We're going to ramp up fundraising once we identify a property," Moore said.

Wherever they wind up, Moore plans to stay focused on maintaining the magic — something that transcends typical retail metrics. And the word is out. When Kamala Harris' upcoming book tour in support of her campaign memoir "107 Days," makes its Philadelphia stop, she'll be appearing at the Met in partnership with Uncle Bobbie's.

"I am most proud that we, for the last eight years, have consistently and unapologetically brought Black people joy," Moore said. "We are making Black people feel seen, valued, and represented. And they have joy. That's not something that really shows up on a balance sheet. It's just something that you know and can see."

As Uncle Bobbie's prepares for its next chapter, Hill's original vision — inspired by the living room where he found books and critical thinking — continues to evolve. The store that began as one man's effort to preserve Black literary spaces has become something larger: a successful model for how independent bookstores can be anchors for community, conversation and culture. ■

## Pick your own

**W**hen harvest time brings a chill to the air, leaves aren't all that start landing on Germantown Avenue. For stylewatchers, the fall fashion drop might be the most wonderful time of the year. We asked a few of the Avenue's shopowners, salespeople, and store managers to show us their one favorite item in store, right now. The results reveal a bounty of treasures all ripe for the picking!

**Top row, from left:**

TC Unlimited: For Her NYC, "She Has Fire in Her Soul" camouflage jacket, \$145; El Quetzal: Woden sneakers from Denmark, fish leather, cork insoles, other recycled materials; \$125; Laête: Il Bisonte "Le Laudi" bag in caffè, vegetable-tanned leather, \$670; Gravers Lane Gallery: Lisa Belsky, "Knit Lace Basket," porcelain, 7.5" x 7.5" x 7.5", \$1540."

**Middle row, from left:**

HomeWorks: Set of two quail pillows, hand-stitched and beaded in India, 23" x 15" each, \$102; Ember: Brooklyn Candle Studio Apple Cider candle with scents of "crisp apple, cinnamon, clove, cedarwood," \$45; Windfall Gallery: Ayala Bar earrings, hand-beaded in Israel, \$138; Giraffe: Jetty sweater for men in olive, 100% cotton, \$80.

**Bottom row, from left:**

Giraffe: Le Lis Doodle sweater for women, polyester/rayon/nylon, \$55; Villavillekula: Huggalugs pumpkin sweater, soft yarn made from recycled plastic bottles, sizes newborn to 4, \$48, and iminthe loop hat, wool blend, \$34; Between Friends Boutique: Gustave Klimt "The Kiss" Scarf, 36" x 12", cashmere and cotton, \$25, and Vincent Van Gogh "Sunflowers" gloves, \$20; Style by Blain: Alden boot in Rabello, made in the U.S. for the store, horsehide, \$1080.





Photos by  
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# FRIENDS OF THE WISSAHICKON

FALL 2025 VOLUME 34 • NUMBER 3

## IN THIS ISSUE

A Decade of ATC Stories – p. 2

FOW Seeks Executive Director – p. 8

Fall Valley Talks – p. 12

## A MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Summer is typically such a joyful season in the Wissahickon, where the park's tree canopy is a cool respite from the hot summer sun. But after this year's intense heat, humidity, and storms, punctuated by some atypical occurrences, like recurrent coyote sightings along the Cresheim Trail, and the downright odd JetSki parked on Magargee Dam, I'm especially looking forward to fall's crisp days and colorful beauty.



Despite these challenges and some cancellations due to the high heat index, our dedicated staff and volunteer crews kept up in their constant care of the park, from clearing downed trees and litter, tending trails and making repairs, to engaging with visitors about the park and Leave No Trace. Read about our productive summer on page 9. If you're inspired to join the ranks of our specialized volunteers, we're accepting applications for the 2026 class of Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders (p. 11).

We believe it's never too soon to start connecting with nature, which is why we've partnered with the School District of Philadelphia for a robust offering of youth programming. We welcomed kids to the Wissahickon this summer through our summer intern field experience, and we've been planning for the next year of the Little Friends of the Wissahickon program. See page 8 for how to support one couple's matching gift to help enhance this program and foster the next generation of park stewards.

The saying goes that that time flies when you're having fun, so it's not hard to believe 10 years have passed since we started the All Trails Challenge. There are many reasons why people take part year after year, and we captured some of them to motivate you, beginning on page 2.

But the common thread that runs through all the stories is that the Wissahickon is an integral part of their lives and they're committed to investing in the park's future. It's a symbiotic relationship, really – the park gives so much to us, and we want to give back, whether through activities like the ATC and volunteering, or membership and direct donations.

Whatever the means, these contributions enable such important improvements as last year's Lida Way Pedestrian Bridge and the recently completed 450-foot stone staircase and reroute that now connects the Orange and White trails.

It takes a strategic and visionary individual to lead an organization like FOW, which works to maintain the balance between sustaining a healthy ecosystem and being a welcoming, accessible recreational resource for the millions of visitors who love the Wissahickon. We're currently seeking a person who will help FOW usher in the organization's next chapter of growth and positive impact. See page 8 for requirements and how to apply.

Your support makes a difference in the Wissahickon!

With gratitude,

Sarah Marley, Interim Executive Director

# FOW GETS CANDID

FOW has earned the Platinum Seal of Transparency 2025, the highest level of recognition awarded by Candid (formerly GuideStar) to nonprofit organizations demonstrating exceptional transparency in their operations and reporting. It signifies that a nonprofit has shared comprehensive information about its goals, strategies, capabilities, achievements, and progress indicators with the public, allowing donors and stakeholders to make informed decisions about their support.

Platinum  
Transparency  
2025  
**Candid.**

**WANT MORE FOW NEWS?**  
Read our expanded digital  
newsletter with the latest news, here.



## MEMBERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**Support our stewardship mission in Wissahickon Valley Park and enjoy some great perks too!**

**All members at the \$45 level and up receive:**

20% off FOW park merchandise

10% off at Valley Green Inn

10% off at Chestnut Hill Brewing Co.

Newly updated Wissahickon Valley Park pocket map (free for new members and membership upgrades)

Become a  
member here:



## FRIENDS OF THE WISSAHICKON

40 W. Evergreen Ave., Suite 108  
Philadelphia, PA 19118-3324  
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*The mission of Friends of the Wissahickon is to conserve the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley and stimulate public interest therein.*

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All photos are by FOW unless noted.



## CELEBRATING A DECADE OF FUN AND IMPACT WITH THE ALL TRAILS CHALLENGE

Ten years ago, FOW launched the All Trails Challenge (ATC) to encourage park visitors to explore Wissahickon Valley Park's 2,000+ acres and more than 50 miles of trails while supporting FOW's extensive conservation work. Since then, this event has grown, with "Challengers" and donors raising nearly \$217,000 to keep the park clean, beautiful, and accessible – from clearing litter, invasive plants, and downed trees, to planting native plants, improving trails, and advocating for a healthy Wissahickon watershed.

There are many reasons why families, friends, and individuals of all ages and fitness levels join the ATC to hike, walk, run, bike or horseback ride through the Wissahickon. In honor of the ATC's 10th year, presented by Newrez, here are six of the most popular:

- Personal challenge
- Physical, mental, and emotional well-being
- Improved motivation
- Experience nature
- Explore more of the Wissahickon's history, geology, and points of interest
- Connect with like-minded people

*Continued next page*



**Guided hikes with FOW Trail Ambassadors is a great way to rack up ATC miles.**



Photo by Steve Csaba.



The ATC invites participants to explore all 50+ miles of Wissahickon Valley Park.

But, perhaps, the most important reason:

**The Wissahickon needs your help, and you can make a real impact.** Every dollar you raise goes directly into improving the 50+ miles of trails you'll explore. (More than 200 participants have achieved this milestone over the years.) Take in the views from the newly installed Lida Way Pedestrian Bridge, stroll down Forbidden Drive past the WPA-era shed at Bluestone Bridge with its restored roof, and hike along freshly rerouted sections of the Orange and Yellow Trails, designed for long-term sustainability. Every step you take fuels projects like these and helps maintain the delicate balance between sustaining a healthy ecosystem and being a welcoming, accessible place for over two million visitors who seek recreation and rejuvenation each year.

But don't just take our word for it. The ATC speaks for itself, through stories from those who share why they're repeat Challengers. Maybe they'll inspire you to join this special club.

*Thank you to all our sponsors!*



## MORE ATC RESOURCES

To make participating in the ATC even easier and more fun, FOW has created new ways to engage and stay connected. This year's ATC features new resources to help Challengers track miles and reach their goals, bigger and better events, and exciting adventures and prizes for the top finishers and fundraisers. And we'll be providing weekly route recommendations to help keep participants on course throughout the event.

### New this year:

- ATC Hike Series, comprised of 15 hikes (that's more than one a week!) led by FOW Trail Ambassadors that will take you through almost every inch of trails in the Wissahickon for the duration of the event.
- Newly designed ATC Passport, where you can track all your unique miles and highlight the trails you've walked, FOW's brand-new updated pocket map, and a special prize.
- The Strava Club, a new community group on the Strava mileage-tracker app, where Challengers can connect and share updates on their ATC journey.

As always, Challengers are automatically registered for our weekly ATC bulletin where we'll share routes to get you on the trail, mini challenges for awesome prizes, and more.

The last day for Challengers to track their miles and fundraise to qualify for a slew of prizes is on **November 6**. There's still time to get in on the fun. Register at [fow.org/atc](http://fow.org/atc).

Thank you to our sponsors: Newrez; Aqua, an Essential Utilities Company; Univest Financial; and our partner Philadelphia Parks & Recreation. Interested in becoming a sponsor of the 10th anniversary ATC? Email [development@fow.org](mailto:development@fow.org) for more information.

# STORIES

## FROM THE TRAILS



Addy and Wiley during last year's ATC.

### GOODNER-DANIELS FAMILY

Aly Goodner, is director of the center for public purpose at the William Penn Charter School, which supports teachers' exploration of social and environmental justice issues. She grew up in Chestnut Hill, regularly visiting the Wissahickon. Paul Daniels, owner/operator of the PAPERtrail Bike Cafe in Historic Rittenhouse Town, started running on the trails in high school. Their family team of Challengers, which in 2023 placed second in total funds raised, includes daughter Addy, 11, and son Wiley, 9. In the early 2020s, Addy took over Team Goodner-Daniels Family fundraising and engagement component, sending updates and thank-yous to their supporters.

*Our first ATC was in 2017. Initially, we were just drawn to being in nature in this beautiful part of Philadelphia and being together as a family in this space, connected to each other and the environment. However, we quickly discovered how much you can learn about the city's rich history by visiting structures like the Looking West and Toleration statues and Valley Green Inn. One of our family's interests is Lenape history, so while we were exploring this incredible natural space, first stewarded by the Lenape, we made it a priority to learn about indigenous history in the area and continued efforts by the Lenape to steward this land. We appreciate that FOW is engaging people in and making accessible all the stories of the park — we prioritize that with our kids (learning the stories of people) and want to expose them to like-minded organizations.*

*To people who say they don't have time to do the ATC, I say they need to have a different perspective. The beauty of this event is that you can enjoy the trails in whatever way makes sense for you. The fact that we've been able to do it for so many years as a family with two young kids—and complete 28 to 35 miles on average each year—is a testament to its flexibility [in relation] to people's lives. We don't want to be structured. Instead, we'll look at our week and see where it's taking us, then build in a hike by our home, Paul's shop, or somewhere else close to the park. We determine that we're going to get in a hike today, be in nature, and be appreciative of that.*

*Addy speaks for our family when she says she loves hiking in the Wissahickon since we get to be surrounded by nature, and she likes being part of the ATC because it is our opportunity to help protect this special place in Pennsylvania.*

More stories on next page

# STORIES

## FROM THE TRAILS



The Henrys at the Looking West statue.

### MARY and PAUL HENRY

Mary and Paul Henry moved to Chestnut Hill in 2020 from New Jersey to be closer to their daughter and son-in-law who live in East Falls. They heard about Wissahickon Valley Park, and one of the first things they did was request a map from FOW (and soon became members). When they heard about the ATC, they signed up and participated that year and again in the next, both times completing all 50 miles. Retired and in their late seventies, the Henrys are an active couple: Mary likes dancing, and Paul runs daily (he's done both the Broad Street Run and plans to tackle the Philadelphia Half-Marathon this fall.) . They go on walking tours to destinations like the Smokies and, this summer, to Scotland (where they walked an average of 10 to 15 miles daily over a week). After skipping the ATC to pursue other activities, they've registered to become Challengers as Team Boomers once again.

*Our strategy the first year was to go somewhere on a given day and circle back, never retracing our steps. The second year, we added two new places for us: Carpenter's Woods and Cresheim Creek. This year, we want to do the whole White Trail and Orange Trail, end to end. We'd also like to check off each of the bridges featured in the 2025 FOW calendar. We appreciate that there are so many ways to enter the park and how accessible the trailheads are. And thanks to everyone who keeps the trails so clean and well maintained.*

*The ATC is a great way to get outdoors and experience nature. And the views! You don't realize you're in the city. Like any other project, you break it into small, manageable pieces. Walk at your own pace, take the time to stop and look around. Beyond nature, there are a lot of beautiful and interesting things to see, like the many structures and a history that's all over the park. It's a fun surprise to come across, say, a stone wall on a trail and wonder why it's there. Some trails are flat, some are steep, some are mostly dirt, others have rocks and boulders—the variety of the experience makes it fantastic!*

# STORIES

## FROM THE TRAILS

### PATTY DAVIS

For Patty Davis, being in the Wissahickon was a family affair. Her dad proposed to her mom at the Looking West Statue. She hiked with her parents and her mom's Cub Scout Pack. Patty and her dad ice-skated on the creek. Growing up in Chestnut Hill, she and her friends loved hiking to Devil's Pool or playing in the creek by Harper's Meadow. Feeling love for the park, wanting to do something different from her job as a social worker, and planning for life after retirement led her to become a Trail Ambassador (TA) about five years ago. In 2024, Patty participated in her first ATC, and she's eager to do it again this year.



Patty Davis self-photo.

*The ATC challenged me to get out into the park more. It got me to go on more hikes led by other TAs, which gave me structure (plus I learned a lot), so I signed up for as many as I could. I had a weekly goal, and I would fulfill it with the help of other TAs, and friends or family members, who would either hike with me as part of their donation or send donations. The ATC gives you an opportunity to meet new people interested in hiking. Through Facebook, I connected with people I didn't know who were doing the Challenge and were looking for people to hike with. It can take you to places in the Wissahickon you may have heard about but never visited. Because I tried to go to a different place on every hike, I finally saw the Toleration Statue and the Henry Houston Statue for the first time. I ended up completing 51 miles!*

*Having been raised in the area and spending time as a kid in the Wissahickon made me love it and want to protect it. The message of being an environmental steward is important, especially with climate change. The ATC is a great platform to raise awareness that the park needs people's attention, and highlight the visible improvements that FOW makes.*

*In my practice as a social worker, I would try to encourage clients to get out of the city and into nature, where there's more oxygen. It gives you energy, calms your mind, and feeds your soul. It's restorative.*

More stories on next page

# STORIES

## FROM THE TRAILS

### JULIE GOOD

Julie Good has strong memories tied to the Wissahickon. Her dad would bring her and her sister to feed the ducks at Valley Green. In high school and college, she would accompany friends to the park to watch them climb. Years later, she and her husband would bring her daughter to the park, and in the fall they would catch falling leaves. (He would pay her a quarter for each one she caught, which wasn't easy!) As a care partner for her aging husband, Julie is trying to keep her mind and body active. Shortly after she retired last year as a cultural nonprofit leader, she read in FOW's newsletter about upcoming recruiting for the 2025 class of Crew Leaders, and she joined.



Julie Good

*My dad and I made walking in the Wissahickon with my dog a Sunday morning ritual. It was our sacred time that spouses, friends, etc. could not impinge on. There were probably only three Sundays in any given year when we didn't walk together until he passed away in 2018. When the ATC was announced, he did it solo, but the next year we both participated, often walking together and enjoying the pleasure of discovering new trails. The ATC encourages me to explore new parts of the Wissahickon, and last year I made it a point to find a new trail at least once a week.*

*My father had another Sunday ritual, welcoming his friend Daniel coming to hang out at his house in the afternoon. When my dad was gone, Daniel and I (who have known each other since I was about a year old) decided to take Sunday morning walks together. Daniel is now 83, and we are still walking every Sunday, so he's become part of my ATC journey.*

*I'm really glad that I have gotten involved with FOW because of my father, who used to do Trail Ambassador hikes, and that I am able to honor his memory by supporting an organization we both believed in, and to do my small bit to bring awareness to the work of FOW through the ATC.*



Photo courtesy of Let's Go Outdoors

## A MATCH FOR LITTLE FRIENDS

Since 2019, Friends of the Wissahickon has partnered with Let's Go Outdoors to bring the Little Friends of the Wissahickon (LFOW) program to life. Together, we've connected more than 4,000 Philadelphia public school students, K-2nd grade, to the wonder of Wissahickon Valley Park.

Funding for this program supports in-class nature education, field trips to the Wissahickon, and a deepened connection to the natural world for Philadelphia's youth.

This September, with a generous \$10,000 matching gift from Cynthia and Martin Heckscher, your donation will make double the impact on the present and future of these prospective Little Friends of the Wissahickon

**Contribute and make a match today using the QR code or visit [FOW.ORG/LFMATCH](https://www.fow.org/lfmatch)**



### From an LFOW teacher:

*"It was amazing to participate in the LFOW program, especially seeing how my class [was] excited to learn in the classroom but knowing they were going to get out into nature... Seeing them in the woods, which for many was their very first time, was amazing. We were so lucky: this year my students got to see connections with our ELA research about pollinators in the real world. This is my second year engaging with the program, and it truly is one of my students' favorite things, and I already have next year's students asking."*

Double your impact and help FOW raise the critical funds to foster the next generation of nature lovers and land stewards through the Little Friends of the Wissahickon program.

## FOW SEEKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) seeks a strategic and visionary executive director to lead the organization into its next chapter of growth and impact. This individual will be a seasoned, mission-driven leader with a deep commitment to community, public space stewardship, and collaborative partnerships.

The executive director will be responsible for guiding FOW's strategic direction and overseeing its daily operations, programs, partnerships, staff, and volunteers, and ensuring the organization remains financially sustainable, programmatically effective, and aligned with its mission to preserve the Wissahickon Valley.

The successful candidate will possess a strong background in nonprofit leadership, organizational management, and a track record of successful fundraising, with a demonstrated ability to work across public, private, and civic sectors. A skilled communicator and relationship builder, the executive director will serve as the public face of FOW, fostering meaningful engagement with the board of directors, staff, volunteers, funders, sponsors, city officials, and community partners.

Reporting to the board, the executive director will lead a high-performing team of 12+ employees, ensuring alignment between strategic priorities and day-to-day operations, and advancing FOW's commitment to DEI, sustainability, and community access.

**Nominations and applications, including résumé and cover letter, should be directed to Courtney Disston at: [cdisston@disstonsearch.com](mailto:cdisston@disstonsearch.com).**

By Shawn Green, Director of Field Stewardship

It's been an especially interesting few months in Wissahickon Valley Park. From a Porsche being left in the middle of the Orange Trail, to multiple coyote sightings in Cresheim Valley, to a mysterious Jet Ski found on an old dam in the creek, summer 2025 has certainly been unpredictable. Despite these oddities and the oppressive heat and thunderstorms, FOW staff and volunteers made a huge positive impact on the Wissahickon this past summer. Responding to the aftermath of a particularly nasty storm, we removed over 50 downed trees from the natural surface trails throughout the park. This is no easy feat, especially in high humidity, but our hearty crew chipped away at them one by one.

Our dedicated volunteer Trail Ambassadors (TAs) were a regular presence in the park, whether they were leading free guided hikes on a variety of topics or greeting visitors at staff outreach tables stationed at high-use locations on weekends. They also staffed tables at events such as our third annual Love Your Wissahickon Fest, sharing knowledge about Wissahickon geology, giving watershed demonstrations, and running Leave No Trace games. Many thanks to our friends at the Wissahickon Environmental Center and Hiking Hound Adventures for joining us that day.

Our weekly volunteer service events continue to create a big impact, while connecting a variety of people to our mission.

Crew Leaders (CLs) have been especially active during the park's busy season (which also coincides with the park's vegetation growing season). Along with co-leading weekly volunteer service days, many of our CLs take part in an initiative within the program called Zone Stewardship.

Groups of these volunteers are assigned to small sections of the park where they look after trails and planting sites. Now in its fourth year, the initiative continues to have a positive impact on the park and its many users. This season, we coordinated four Saturday service days with several of these zone groups that were incredibly productive and inspiring. We're excited to see this work continue and expand in the coming year.

Our weekly volunteer service events continue to create a big impact, while connecting a variety of people to our mission. This past season, we spent several days working on trails in Houston Meadow (which will continue into the fall), partnered with the Friends of Carpenter's Woods, maintained past planting sites and prepped for upcoming plantings, and completed many hours removing litter from high-use areas in the park such as Devil's Pool.

Every Tuesday morning, the volunteer Structures Crew made their way through the park, mostly focusing on repairing park benches and fencing along Forbidden Drive, and routing and installing new signs. To further our Leave No Trace (LNT) messaging, we installed several signs in the Devil's Pool area to remind park users to carry their trash out with them. For everyone to enjoy the Wissahickon, we all need to minimize our impact on these shared spaces.

Furthering this LNT message were our Seasonal Field Crew members, who spent countless hours in the Valley Green area picking up litter, engaging with park visitors, handing out trash bags, and encouraging responsible use of the park.

This summer, we worked with two separate groups of youth in stewarding the Wissahickon. A new corps of high school students with the Student Conservation Association joined us for two weeks in July, focusing on cleaning out stormwater infrastructure and improving drainage features along a section of the Orange Trail. The second group, from the School District of Philadelphia, spent a week getting hands-on experience in the many aspects of caring for a large, wooded urban park. By maintaining a planting site, removing litter, working on a trail, cleaning stormwater basins, and repairing a gate at a trailhead, they learned about the park as a public recreation space, a watershed, and a habitat. Their hard work, during an especially hot week, earned them over 30 volunteer hours!



FOW installed new signs in the Devil's Pool area to remind visitors to carry out their trash.

All the fun, camaraderie, and hard work continues into the autumn. We have a full schedule of fall Saturday volunteer service days, including:

**SEPTEMBER**

27 National Public Lands Day at Monastery Stables

**OCTOBER**

- 4 Planting by the Red Covered Bridge
- 11 Planting along the Yellow Trail
- 18 Planting in Houston Meadow
- 25 Halloween at the Hermitage Planting (costumes recommended!)

Service events typically run every Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday morning. No experience necessary. We provide the gloves, the tools, and the instruction. For more details and to register, visit [fow.org/events/](http://fow.org/events/).



Field Coordinator John Mellor teaches Emma Solomon how to use a tool. Emma, a 10th grader at Masterman High School, participated in FOW's Summer Stewardship Experience.

# APPLY NOW TO BECOME A FRIENDS OF THE WISSAHICKON TRAIL AMBASSADOR OR CREW LEADER

Do you love the park and want to make a positive difference? Do you want to meet new, like-minded friends? If so, consider applying for one of our dedicated, trained volunteer programs. Each year, Friends of the Wissahickon recruits and trains volunteers to work on a more involved level. Whether it's leading small groups of volunteers in trail work or habitat restoration projects, or engaging park visitors through outreach tables and guided hikes, these volunteers enable us to increase our capacity to steward the park we all love so much. We will soon be recruiting for our 2026 training classes, which take place from February through March. Interested? Here's a snapshot of what these volunteers do:

- **Trail Ambassadors** are park docents who teach park visitors about the park's history, flora, fauna, and geology, and assist with anything from directions to first aid. With only a few park rangers on duty in the Wissahickon, Trail Ambassadors serve a much-needed role in the park by providing regular outreach and assistance to park users, leading hikes, and staffing information tables in the Wissahickon and in the surrounding community. It's an important job because it is through this corps that we are better able to serve the public and protect the park. Read more at [fow.org/trail-ambassadors](http://fow.org/trail-ambassadors).
- **Crew Leaders** are a special corps of stewards who are trained in leading volunteer groups in the Wissahickon, building and improving trails, restoring habitat, and sharing their knowledge and expertise with others. They work directly with FOW staff to plan and lead volunteer service days throughout the park. With the constant natural and human stresses on the park, Crew Leaders play an integral role in keeping the Wissahickon beautiful and sustainable for generations to come. Read more at [fow.org/crew-leaders](http://fow.org/crew-leaders).



TA Hallam Harper discusses Wissahickon rocks at Love Your Wissahickon Fest.

## FOW WELCOMES A NEW STAFF MEMBER



John Mellor and Banjo.  
Photo courtesy of John Mellor

John Mellor has joined FOW's field stewardship team as field coordinator, serving as the main point person for FOW's infrastructure-related work, such as trail building and stewardship, and coordinating repairs on a variety of items, from machines to historic and man-made structures. He is also involved in volunteer training and co-leading Volunteer Service Days, as well as leading specialized volunteers on trail work and structure repair projects.

Most recently, John was a producer and product manager for the TileWorks of Bucks County, where he was responsible for managing staff and daily scheduling, custom mosaic and tile design and installation, and historic restoration. Before that, he spent a decade in the Western United States where he developed skills in environmental education, land stewardship, and parks/recreation management. In Salt Lake City, John served as a parks crew leader for a recreation district, a trail crew groundskeeper for a public open space district, field technician for a county watershed, and a lead guide for a wilderness therapy program. He also served as a naturalist guide at Yosemite National Park.

John earned a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary and kindergarten education from Penn State. A true outdoor enthusiast, he enjoys mountain biking/cycling, swimming, camping, and boating, as well as crafting. But John's greatest joy is spending time with his "big, goofy Goldendoodle," Banjo.

# FALL VALLEY TALKS

Join FOW for its fall series of informative presentations. Members and the public are welcome to attend these free events on Wednesdays from 6–7:30 p.m. Register to attend at [fow.org/events](http://fow.org/events).

**September 17**

**Timothy Grieve-Carlson, PhD**

## ***THE WIZARD OF THE WISSAHICKON: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JOHANNES KELPIUS***

What is the Cave of Kelpius in Wissahickon Valley Park, and who was Johannes Kelpius? Contrary to what Google says, he wasn't the leader of the first American "doomsday cult." Timothy Grieve-Carlson, PhD, an assistant professor and the Gibson Drinko Chair in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, will present research from his new book, *American Aurora: Environment and Apocalypse in the Life of Johannes Kelpius* (Oxford University Press, 2024). He will delve into the history of Kelpius as a tremendously influential but comprehensively misunderstood radical Protestant theologian from Transylvania who settled in what is now Wissahickon Valley Park in 1694.



**Dr. Grieve-Carlson**

**October 15**

**Andrew Conboy**

## ***EXPLORING THE TREES THAT SHAPE WISSAHICKON VALLEY PARK***

The Wissahickon is home to a great diversity of tree species, from the towering tulip poplar and the spiky devil's walking stick to mighty oaks. In this talk, Andrew Conboy, a local urban forester and ISA-certified arborist, will explore common native and invasive species, uncover intriguing remnants from the old nursery, and share the fundamentals of tree identification. He will also discuss the ecological impact of these species—both beneficial and harmful—while revealing insights into restoration ecology. Andrew shares his passion about trees, native plants, and the integration of people and the natural world on his social media platform (@Andrew\_The\_Arborist) and through his ecological restoration nonprofit, the Community Canopy Project.



**Andrew Conboy**

Presented by



# FJC Fund Drive Shifts Focus to Community Refrigerators

by Nima Koliwad, Weavers Way Co-op

**W**eavers Way's Food Justice Committee (FJC) is a committee of members dedicated to advocating for food insecurity issues in our community and who work on projects to make a difference in local neighborhoods. They meet monthly to discuss important issues in the food policy realm that have an impact on families and neighbors. They often have guest speakers who inspire FJC members to host events and activities to engage the Co-op community at large. One such initiative is an annual food fund drive they host in September to raise awareness and funds for nonprofit organizations that work to alleviate hunger and food insecurity. This year, for the first time, the drive will raise money for community fridges through our Mt Airy, Germantown, Chestnut Hill, and Ambler stores.

Community fridges (or freedges, as they are sometimes called), provide fresh food to anyone in need, without proof of need or enrollment in a social assistance program.

In pre-pandemic years, the food drive included a lot of grassroots efforts from committee members who staffed information tables and spread the word about this initiative. They also collected canned goods and other nonperishable products for local food pantries.

This year, for the first time, the drive will raise money for community fridges through our Mt Airy, Germantown, Chestnut Hill, and Ambler stores.

During COVID, the committee pivoted to raising funds online through the Co-op's website and member portal instead of collecting and distributing groceries. This virtual drive had other benefits: It reached a wider audience of both members and nonmembers who could fundraise for the food pantries. And these online donations were tax deductible.

The monetary donations enabled the food pantries to shop for and stock their shelves with what would best accommodate the needs of their community. Until now, the food fund drives have supported the Matti Dixon Food Pantry in Ambler, Holy Cross Food Pantry in Mt. Airy, and St. Luke's Community Nutrition Programs in Germantown.

The decision to raise funds for the community fridges was made after much research and discussion. Community fridges, whose mission statement is "take what you need, when you need, and leave what you can," have become prominent in our area over the past few

years with good reason. Open 24/7, the program's mission statement - "take what you need, when you need and leave what you can" - endorses a more accessible and inclusive approach and fill a gap in the food supply chain better than food pantries or food cupboards.

Germantown's community fridges, located on Armat Street in front of Greene Street Friends School and on High Street near Germantown Avenue, were role models to others who coordinated similar efforts in their communities. In Mt. Airy, there is a community fridge and food pantry on Stenton Avenue at Mt. Airy Unitarian Universalist Church. There is also a community fridge at Ambler Mennonite Church on East Mt. Pleasant Avenue in Ambler.

Community fridges are managed and operated by volunteers who are passionate about the cause, incurring low to no overhead or fixed costs. They put a lot of effort into developing deep connections with local restaurants, bakeries, and other food establishments, which donate excess food that otherwise would be discarded and instead is packed and stocked in the community fridges.

Weavers Way recognizes the important role all community fridges play in our communities, from sharing fresh food with people in need, to helping reduce food waste. It's exciting to have these valuable resources in our neighborhoods that are solely supported by community and individual contributions.

The Food Justice Committee is thrilled to help support these efforts with its fundraiser this fall. We encourage all Co-op members and shoppers to donate generously next month and help make this fundraiser a huge success. Donations can be made online through our website at [weaversway.coop](http://weaversway.coop) and at all Weavers Way locations. Your donation will help people in our neighborhoods impacted by food insecurity. All money raised is directed toward the fridges' ongoing care and stocking.

*Nima Koliwad is  
Outreach Manager  
for Weavers Way.*

*Co-op members  
earn working  
member credit by  
volunteering for  
FOW.*



**The Ambler Community Refrigerator on the grounds of the Ambler Mennonite Church.**

**Photo by Nima Koliwad**



# Night-singing Insects

By Tony Croasdale, Wissahickon Environmental Center

One of the harbingers that fall is on the way is when katydids begin calling their name throughout midsummer nights. By the time September rolls around, autumn field crickets will fill September evenings with ambient chirps. Orthoptera—the insect order most closely associated with crickets and grasshoppers—includes many species of night-singing insects. These insects emit sound by rubbing specialized structures on their wings together. Most Orthoptera species also sport oversized hind legs built for jumping.

We all know the lovely song of field crickets and the annoying racket of house crickets. Two almost identical species—spring and autumn field crickets—are best distinguished by their singing season. While field crickets may wander into your house, a small black cricket indoors is likely a house cricket. Tree crickets have thin, elongated bodies and are usually brown or green; they live among the leaves of trees and shrubs.



An oblong-winged katydid, one of the night-singing insects of late summer and fall.

Photo by Tony Croasdale

Another ubiquitous Orthoptera sound is the “zip-zip-zap” or “ka-ty-did” of true katydids. With subtle patterns of ticks, trills, and buzzes, most katydid songs sound like a distant sputtering engine.

Handsome trigs, an unusual type of unusual tree cricket, feature a reddish body, black wings, yellow legs, and mouthparts that resemble tiny boxing gloves. Most tree crickets sing high-pitched trills, similar to the songs of the unrelated cicadas.

Another ubiquitous Orthoptera sound is the “zip-zip-zap” or “ka-ty-did” of true katydids. With subtle patterns of ticks, trills, and buzzes, most katydid songs sound like a distant sputtering engine.

Katydid and bush crickets are nocturnal long-horned (antennae-bearing) grasshoppers. True katydids and closely related oblong-winged and angle-winged katydids are arboreal and green, their vertically flattened bodies mimicking leaves. Other types—such as meadow katydids and bush crickets—more closely resemble typical grasshoppers and live in low-growing vegetation. Some species even boast hilarious names like the “slightly musical conehead.”

To see some of these insects, join the Wissahickon Environmental Center (WEC) insect or “bio-blitz” activity. WEC hosts several a year, including in the fall. To hear these insects, attend any evening event from July to October.

*For more information on programming and to visit the Wissahickon Environmental Center, please visit its Facebook page at [facebook.com/WissahickonEC/](https://facebook.com/WissahickonEC/) or its program registration page [here](#).*

*Tony Croasdale, MS, CE, is an environmental education program specialist and administrator at the Wissahickon Environmental Center.*

# DAN WINDLE, DISTRICT 4



Photo courtesy of Dan Windle.

**Dan Windle** has been with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation for nearly 17 years, doing “a little bit of everything.” This variety prepared him well for his current role as District 4 operations manager.

Dan is the backbone of field-level operators for District 4, the city’s largest district. Responsible for 82 sites, consisting of rec centers and parks, including Wissahickon Valley Park, Dan serves as the crucial link between identifying what needs to be done and coordinating the necessary people, resources, and strategies to accomplish the task.

“Dan uses his extensive trail-wide knowledge at site visits to determine the manpower – from FOW, PPR, or other partners – materials, and machinery needed for a specific task,” said Varian Bosch, FOW’s field operations manager.

The work is wide-ranging and anything but routine, from picking up trash and filling potholes, to clearing downed trees, repairing benches and fence posts, as well as cleaning picnic areas and bathrooms, removing graffiti, renovating ball fields, picking up and dropping off supplies...the list goes on. Dan credits his “small, but mighty” crew of 10 (with five additional crew members in the summer) for the sheer amount of work that gets done.

To cover a district as vast as his, Dan has turned his truck into a field office so he can travel among locations with chain saws and pole saws and other supplies at the ready.

“He’s always willing to do whatever he can to get the job done, even pitching in himself if needed,” said Varian.

Dan has loved nature since he was a child. He grew up in Frankford, going to Fox Chase Farm and engaging in 4-H activities. Trading his closer local school for WB Saul High School, which took him three buses to get to, he studied animal and plant science, with a focus on arbor culture.

“Going to Saul really changed my life,” said Dan. He fondly remembers when a PPR operations manager came to speak (and offered him a job!), and now, in a full-circle moment, Dan has become the guest speaker at Saul from PPR.

After about six years working exclusively in the rec center setting, Dan loves that his current job lets him spend more time in the woods, and he is grateful to Varian and District Supervisor Sam Williams for helping him get acclimated.

“I’m a parks guy at heart. I think I was born to do this job,” said Dan, who loves nothing more than taking his one-and-a-half-year-old daughter to the Wissahickon and looks forward to the day he can do the same with his second daughter, due in January.



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# Art, history, and nature come alive at Laurel Hill Cemetery

With more than two dozen events planned for September and October, Laurel Hill Cemetery is preparing for one of its busiest seasons.



By **CLARK PERKS**

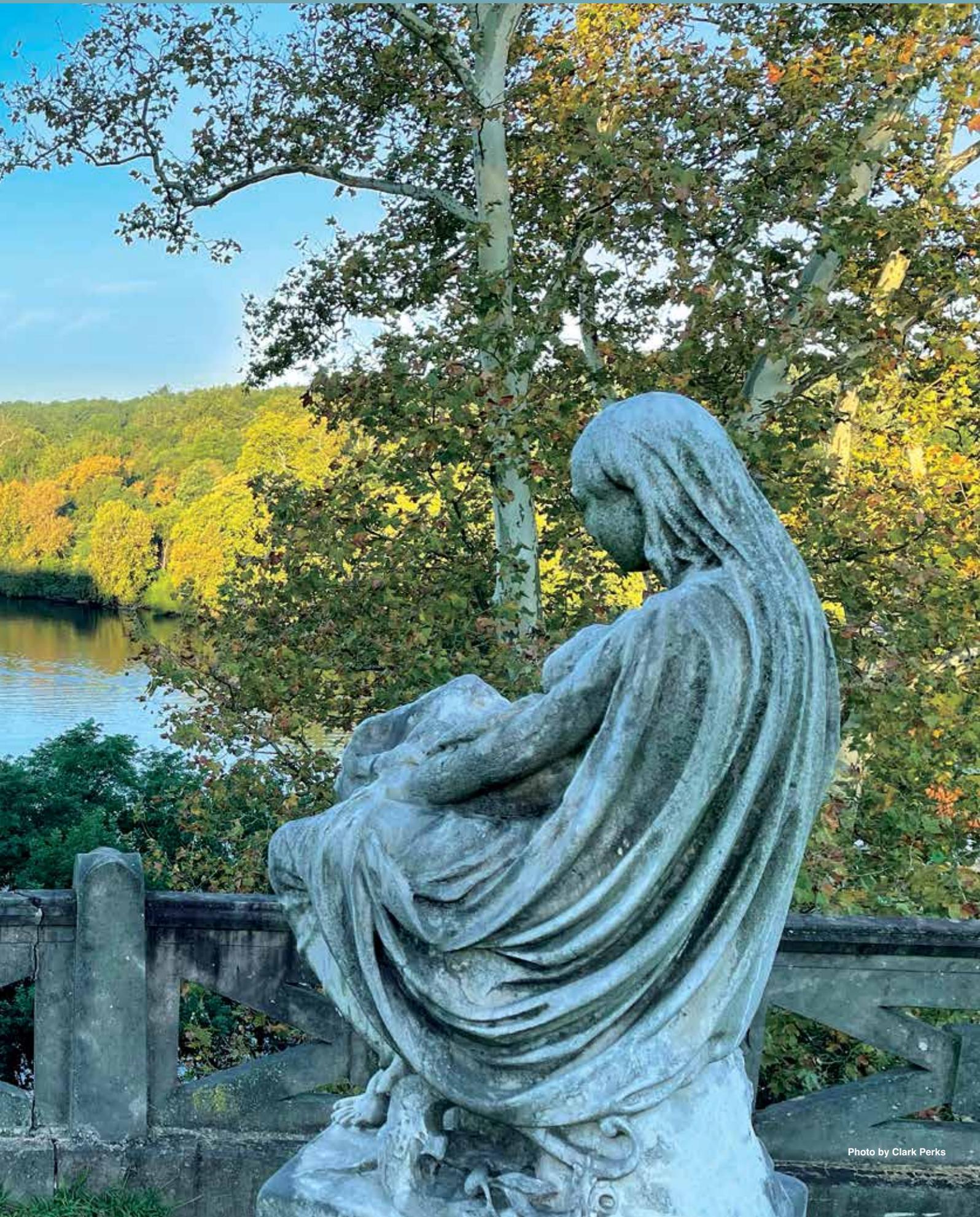


Photo by Clark Perks

**A**nd with its blend of history, sculpture, and a full arboretum, it's a surprisingly lively place for visitors (though not so much for its residents).

The cemetery is huge. Nancy A. Goldenberg, president and CEO of Laurel Hill, explained, "Laurel Hill East, overlooking Kelly Drive, is 78 acres, and its companion cemetery across the Schuylkill River in Bala Cynwyd, Laurel Hill West, is 187 acres, a total of 265 acres. We are much more than a cemetery."

Some unique upcoming events include the Rest in Peace 5K Run on October 18. "It starts at dusk and it's a difficult course through Laurel Hill East. Costumes are encouraged. Dogs can participate on leash and they can be in costume as well," Goldenberg said. "After the run, there's beer and prizes. Also coming up on September 20 is the Market of the Macabre, with unusual and assorted oddities and artwork. We have probably close to 100 vendors, maybe a little more, and last year we had about 5,000 people attend."

## Tours and traditions

"We also have well-loved annual events like True Tales from the Tombs," Goldenberg said. "It's an hourlong tour where the cast from The Not Ready for After-Life Players enact stories of some of the permanent residents. We have a couple of new events this year in honor of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Navy and Marine Corps."

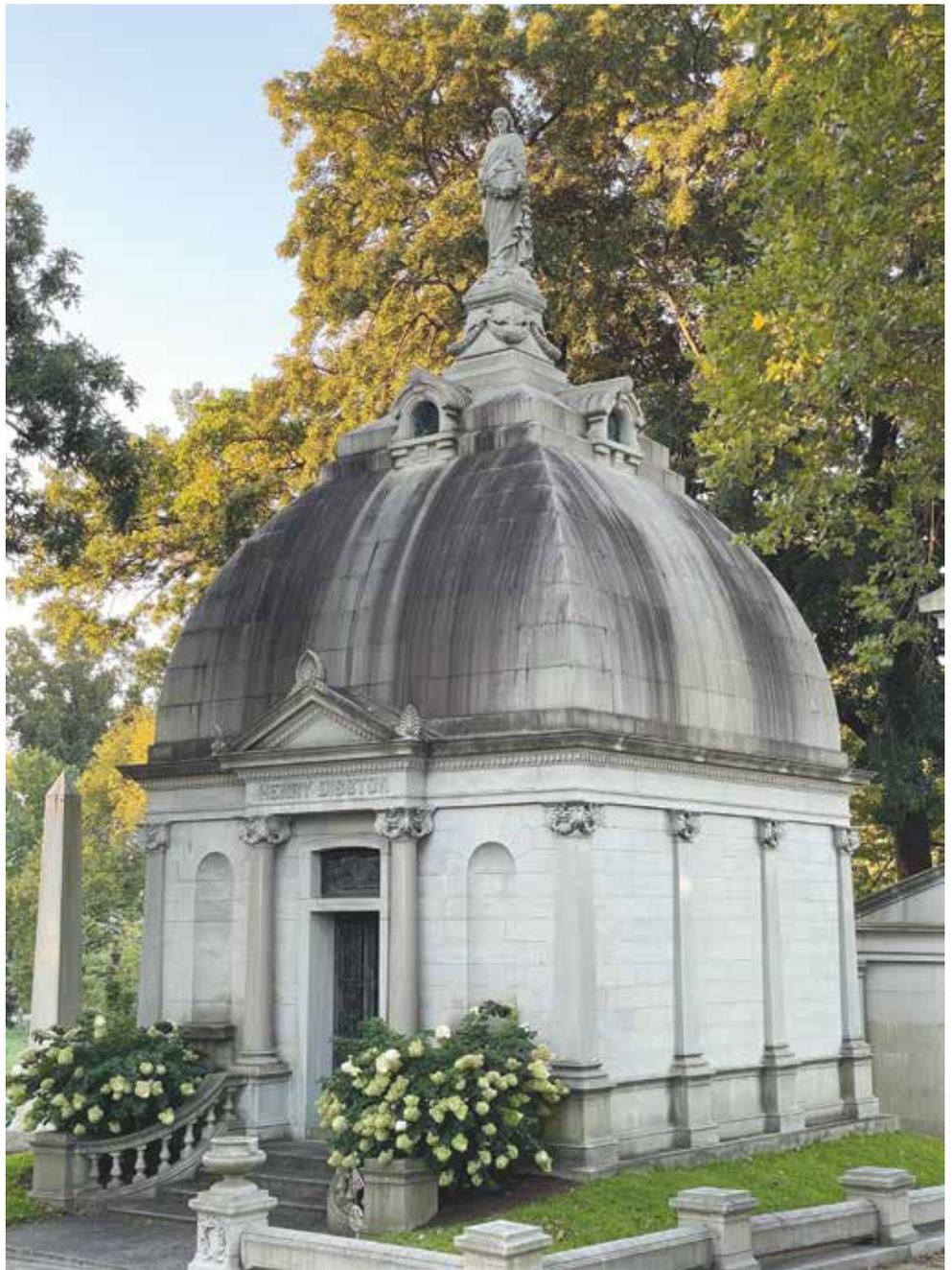
Other tours include "Hot Spots & Storied Plots," held the second Saturday and fourth Friday of every month. Tom Keels has been a volunteer tour guide at Laurel Hill for 30 years, and he will conduct this tour on Halloween morning.

Keels said a monument he often features is commonly called "The Twins."

He said, "To me this is the quintessential Laurel Hill monument because it's such an eloquent expression of grief and loss: a man depicting his dead wife and children. Child mortality was extremely high, and many mothers died during childbirth."

Of course, behind every stone there's a story. "Henryk Dmochowski was born in what is today Lithuania," Keels said. "He renamed himself Henry D. Saunders upon arriving in Philadelphia in 1852. He had some success as a sculptor, and he married a young pianist named Helena Schaaff. Her first pregnancy in 1855 ended in stillbirth. In 1857, her second pregnancy ended in death for both mother and child."

Keels continued, "Soon after, Henry began work on their memorial, which shows a disconsolate woman clutching her two wailing babies and attempting to comfort them in vain. At



her feet lies an unstrung lyre, symbolizing the musical voice that has been silenced. On the other side is a bas-relief profile of Henry, along with his sculptor's tools. By adding his own face, he makes the tomb a family portrait. Henry does not rest with his family. He returned to Lithuania in 1861 and died two years later leading a revolt against the Russian army. The location of his body is unknown."

## A living arboretum

Laurel Hill is also an accredited Level II Arboretum. Goldenberg said, "Accreditation is given by ArbNet, which uses a rating system based on things like number of species, how many staff you have caring for your arboretum, number of volunteers, programming, research,

things like that. We're very close to becoming a Level III arboretum."

"We currently have five state championship trees," she also noted. "To be a state champion, you need to be the largest of your species in the state. The largest tree in our entire 265-acre arboretum actually isn't a state champion — it's a ginkgo tree — the fourth largest ginkgo in the state. It's just gorgeous."

## Historic roots

Founded in 1836, Laurel Hill is the second-oldest rural cemetery in the United States, established when crowded urban cemeteries left families struggling to find graves. In 1869, it expanded across the river, creating Laurel Hill West in Bala Cynwyd. It was designated a



Photos by Clark Perks

*On page 42: The grave of Helena Schaaff and her two babies features a statue of the three carved by her husband, Henryk Dmochowski.*

*On facing page: The largest mausoleum at Laurel Hill East is the tomb of Henry Disston, which cost \$60,000 to build in 1878.*

*Adjusted for inflation, the cost would be more than \$1.75 million today.*

*Above: The cemetery's towering obelisks and sculptures atop columns reflect the 19th-century tastes of the Victorian Era.*

*They appeared about the time the Washington Monument was being built – everybody wanted one.*

National Historic Landmark in 1998.

Though Laurel Hill East was founded 189 years ago, it is still an active cemetery with space for new burials and has “somewhere between 1,100 and 1,500 spaces left,” Goldenberg said. “It’ll certainly last for a while, but where somebody wants to be buried is not always where we have lots. We’re always looking for new and innovative ways to add to our inventory.”

### **Art, monuments, and memory**

Sometimes, though, “new and innovative ways” end up being a return to a practice’s origins. The cemetery’s towering obelisks and elaborate mausoleums reflect the 19th-century tastes of the Victorian Era. “The many obelisks

appeared about the time the Washington Monument was being built; everybody wanted one. Tastes change over time, and what I’m seeing now is more interest in green spaces and creating gardenesque-lots,” Goldenberg said.

Green burials have become increasingly popular. “We have three green burial areas, one at Laurel Hill East and two at Laurel Hill West. They are beautiful meadows and are very popular,” she said. “There are no caskets involved, although you can be in a biodegradable container, but many people choose just to be in a shroud and laid in the earth. There’s no embalming. I’m proud to say we’re the only cemetery in the world to have received SITES Gold certification for one of our green burial areas. Because of the designation, we’re not permitted to use any power equipment, and all

the graves are dug by hand.”

Nonetheless, sculptures fill the cemetery. Goldenberg said one of the most photographed monuments is at the grave of William Warner. It shows a woman lifting the lid of Warner’s coffin, and his soul escaping toward heaven. “It’s absolutely stunning,” Goldenberg said, “and sort of an enigma.” It was carved by Alexander Milne Calder, whose son, Alexander Stirling Calder, also has a sculpture in the cemetery. The father and grandfather of Alexander “Sandy” Calder, famous for his mobiles, are both buried in Laurel Hill West.

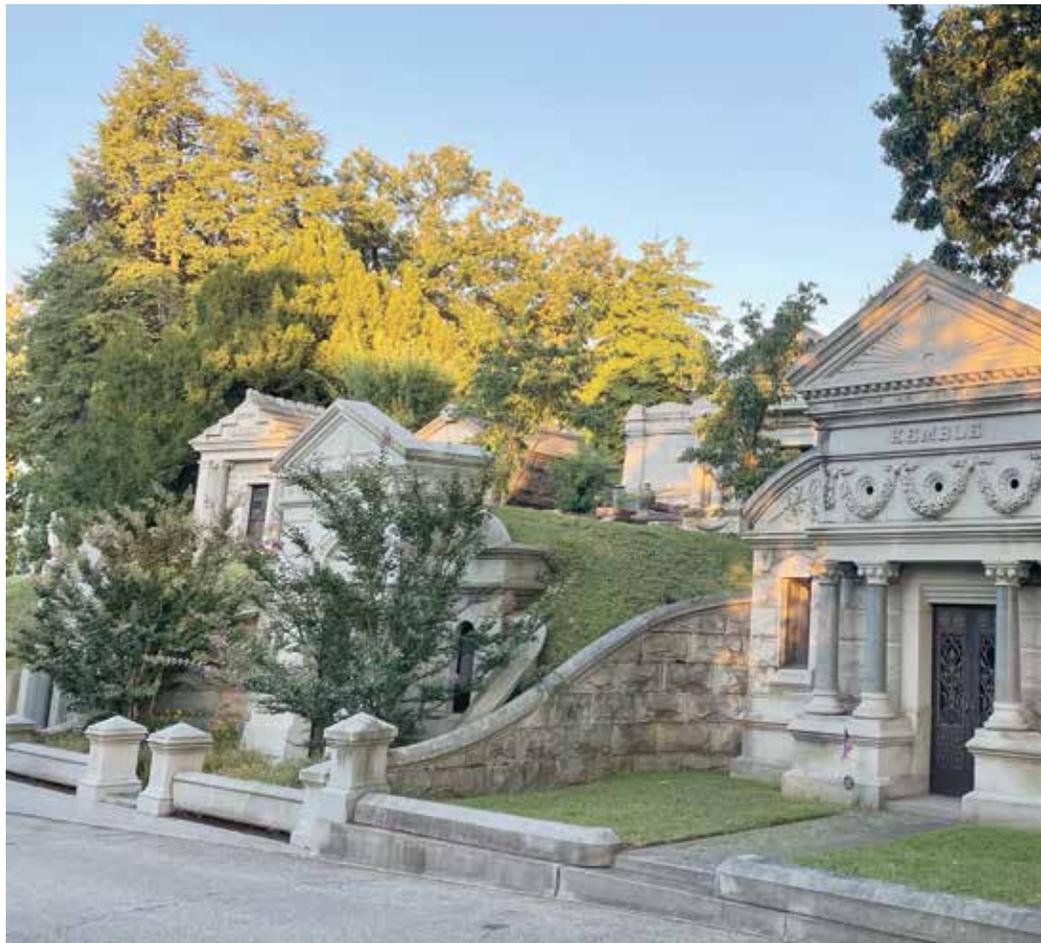
One of Goldenberg’s personal favorites is a sculpture called ‘Aspiration,’ created by Harriet Frishmuth, who is buried at Laurel Hill East. “It’s a sculpture of a beautiful woman reaching for heaven.”

The largest mausoleum at Laurel Hill East is the tomb of Henry Disston, who founded Keystone Saw Works in Philadelphia in 1840. Goldenberg said, “The mausoleum was built in 1878. It cost \$60,000 to build back then. It’s got a beautiful statue on it called ‘Memory,’ and it occupies a prime location on ‘Millionaires Row.” Adjusted for inflation, the cost of Disston’s mausoleum would be more than \$1.75 million today.

### A proud man’s tomb

Disston’s tomb was designed by John McArthur Jr., who went on to design Philadelphia’s City Hall. It is often a highlight of Keels’ tours. “Henry Disston is one of those great rags-to-riches-stories,” Keels said. “He came to America as a young teenager and he was an orphan. His father died while the ship was in sight of Philadelphia. His little sister was taken to an orphanage, and he was apprenticed to a saw maker.”

“Disston was a natural scientist,” Keels explained. “He came up with a form of steel that was incredibly strong, but incredibly flexible at the same time. It was perfect for making saws. Disston would walk into a hardware store and pick a saw up off the counter, bend it in half, and it would snap. The owner would come roaring at him and he would open his sample

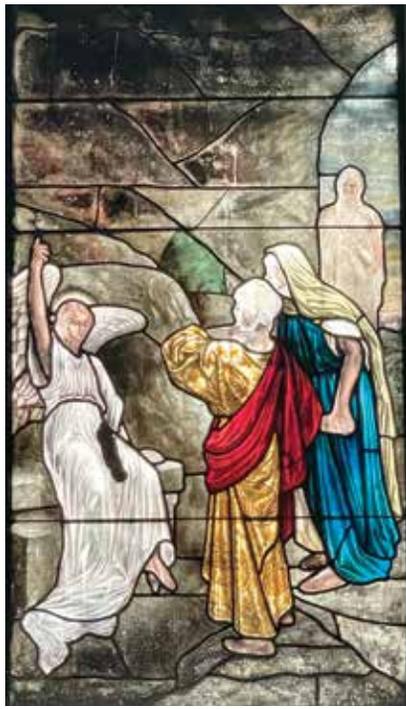


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Photos by Clark Perks

Above: The mausoleum of Robert N. Carson boasts an intricate stained glass window that can only be seen by looking through the door.

At left: "Millionaires Row" includes impressive mausoleums near the Schuylkill River that call to mind ancient Rome.

case, pull out a similar saw, bend it the same way, and it didn't break. His saw works became the largest in the country."

### Past and present

The cemetery's Ridge Avenue gatehouse is an impressive facade sporting classical columns that look like they're made of marble. "They're actually wood and they are not structural," Goldenberg said. "We just completed the exterior rehabilitation of the gatehouse. It's the last original and oldest remaining building in Laurel Hill, dating from our founding in 1836." The gatehouse rehabilitation was a \$4.9 million project.

Goldenberg reflected on the cemetery's enduring civic role: "Our founders were following the model that was emerging in Europe at the time when cities were industrializing, and very dirty, and rampant with disease. They were searching for places outside of the city where people could breathe fresh air, where they could spend the day with their families and walk around and have a picnic. Remember, Fairmount Park didn't exist yet. The Art Museum didn't exist yet. There weren't places in the city where you could escape to nature and fresh air.

Rural cemeteries were meant to be places for burial, but also serve the purpose of a park

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where people could spend a lovely afternoon strolling and enjoying themselves. It had a dual purpose. It became so popular that at one point in our history, people had to get tickets to get in.”

“I’d like to think that today we are getting back to that role at Laurel Hill, and serve not only as a beautiful burial spot, but also as a place for recreation and civic value,” Goldenberg said.

From rare monuments of zinc — marketed as “Bridgeport White Bronze” — to underground vaults, beautiful stained glass that can only be seen by looking through a tiny hole in a mausoleum door, and fictional graves of Rocky characters Adrian and Paulie, Laurel Hill offers layers of history and artistry.

“We always have the future in mind. Stewardship is our second name,” Goldenberg said. “We’re always looking at other areas where we can build more green burial areas or community mausoleums. We still have the interior of the gatehouse that we’d like to restore. We will never run out of projects.”

For more information about upcoming events and tours at Laurel Hill Cemetery, visit [laurelhillphl.com](http://laurelhillphl.com). ■



Photos by Clark Perks

One of the favorite sculptures of Nancy A. Goldenberg, Laurel Hill’s President and CEO, is “Aspiration” by Harriet Frishmuth.

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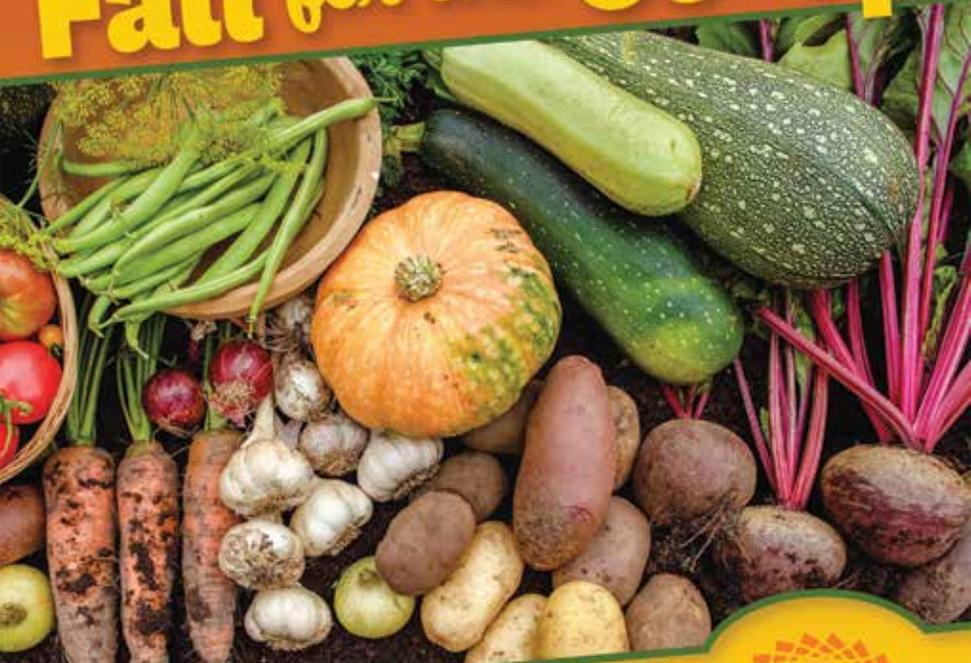
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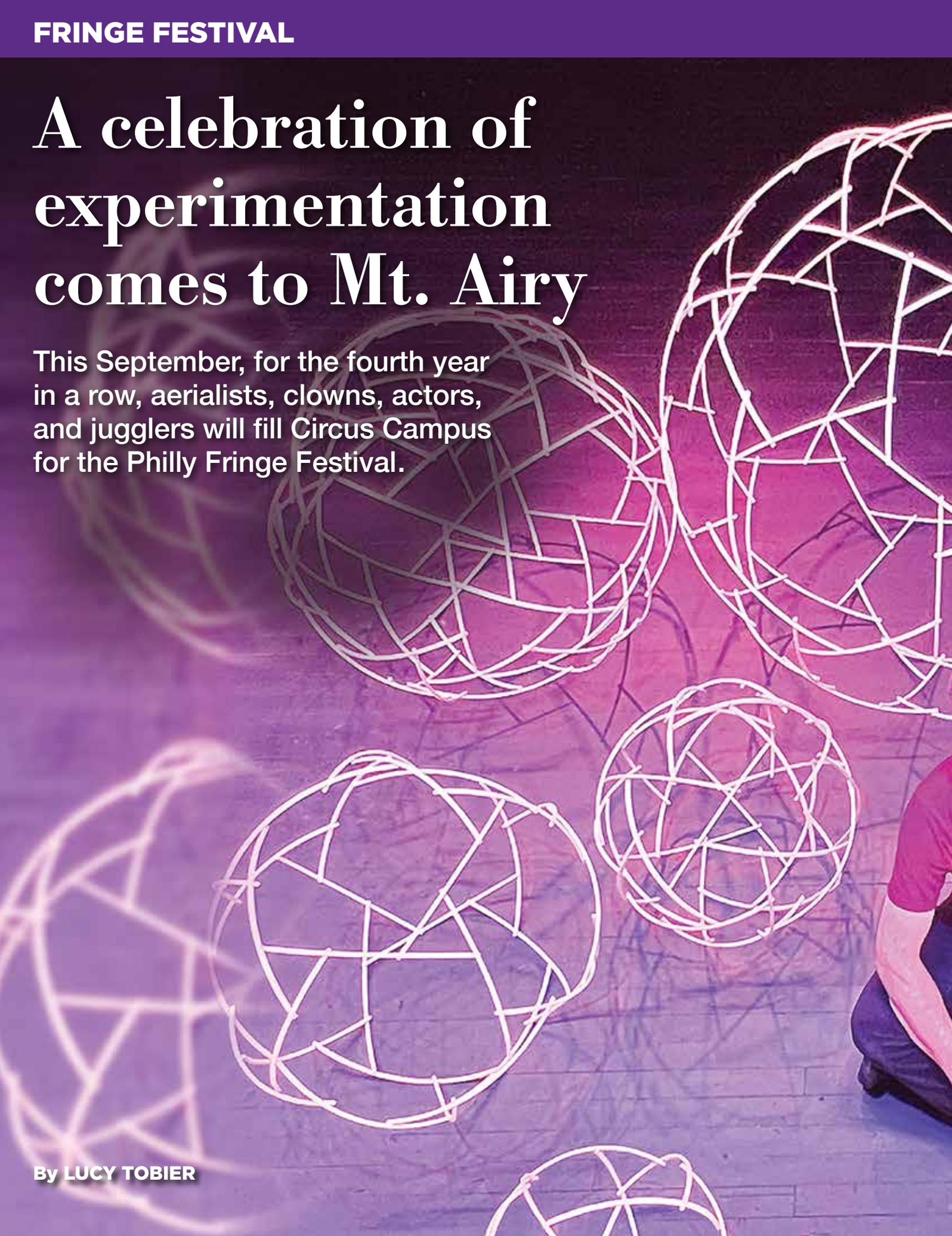
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# A celebration of experimentation comes to Mt. Airy

This September, for the fourth year in a row, aerialists, clowns, actors, and jugglers will fill Circus Campus for the Philly Fringe Festival.

By LUCY TOBIER





Following the Fringe Festival's ethos of experimentation and pushing artistic boundaries, 12 artists will take risks and debut new routines, breaking free of the traditional juggling and circus mold.

This year, the festival runs from Sept. 4-28 at sites throughout the city and Sept. 12-28 at the Circus Campus. Housed since 2017 in the converted St. Madeleine Sophie Catholic Church at 6452 Greene St., the campus includes classrooms and spaces with 40- and 17-foot ceilings where aerialists spin and teach youth and adult classes through the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts (PSCA). On Sept. 27, PSCA staff will perform "Time Loops," a Fringe show telling the history of circus since its U.S. debut on Market Street. According to PSCA Executive Director Kitsie O'Neill, the show asks what artists can learn from circus' past and how to advance the discipline.

O'Neill explained, "With circus you talk about fear, pushing yourself or your limits. ... It's doing something that scares you, obviously in a good, controlled way. You'll be supported with coaches and fellow students."

## Safety first

For Melissa Mellon, PSCA teacher, show producer, and "Timeloops" performer, risk is part of art, but it also requires support and community. "Risk assessment is the thing that we're always making sure we're doing when we're on the floor and when we're performing. We're always looking out for each other, which is really nice. We all know we have each other's backs."

Sometimes during performance, a helping hand can be crucial for staying safe while playing with fire. Hannah Pinkos, owner and managing director of Skylark Circus Arts will, with collaborator and Skylark Creative Director Autumn Cornell, make the company's debut at Fringe with "Lunarium," a surreal circus cabaret set in a mystical realm. The show will feature aerial and fire acts performing outside.

"With all the circus performances I do, safety is the number one priority," Pinkos said. "For fire, we have learned through the community techniques to minimize risk as far as types of fuel to use, attire so there are less chances of there being a flame transfer to the body, and never practicing fire arts alone."

As Fringe artists write and rehearse shows, Circus Campus hopes to be a pillar to support balancing acts, according to juggler and Circus Campus building co-owner Greg Kennedy. Greg bought the church with his wife, Circadium School of Circus Arts Executive Director and PSCA Founder Shana, in 2017 after five years of touring internationally with Cirque Du Soleil. His first show with Fringe was back in 2006, and he has debuted many routines at the festival since.



Photos courtesy of FringeArts

Clockwise from top left: Groups including Enchantment Theatre Company, Philadelphia School of Circus Arts, and Skylark Circus Arts will all perform at the Fringe Festival.

On previous page: Greg Kennedy's *Architectonica* explores the wonders of geometry.

Greg hopes the hub can both support artists by offering a space, videographer, and sound system, and bring people into the building to meet the tenants, including Cocoon Philly yoga studio and Narberth Community Theatre. In the future, he hopes to host open studio sessions and concerts, and says the campus already serves as a park and gathering space.

"We're really doing this to support artists in bringing circus to people at a level where

it hasn't been traditionally seen in the past, something that is equal to dance or music," Greg said.

Greg's own Fringe show this year is "Architectonica," a juggling act that plays with structural balance and mathematical concepts drawing from his engineering background. Greg describes himself as a tactile thinker, and many of his educational outreach performances expose students to math and physics. His experimentations with



structure — the root of the Fringe show — originate from playing with wooden blocks with his now-adult son.

“Architectonica” begins with self-supporting Leonardo da Vinci-style bridges and spheres, pieces inspired by Kenneth Snelson’s “tensegrity” structures, and a mobile that flies into the ceiling once constructed. All acts will involve audience participation.

“You might have noticed there were no

balls getting thrown or caught from my hands, and that was my challenge this year,” Greg said. “That’s what I mean about Fringe being experimental. ... I like to challenge myself to do something different. It’s all about taking chances; it’s the Fringe.”

### Filling funding gaps

Circus Campus’ support for artists is espe-

cially pressing during federal arts funding cuts (Circadium lost a previously-awarded grant for a performance while the show was underway) and in the post-pandemic era. FringeArts Executive Director Nell Bang-Jensen also pointed to the closing of University of the Arts in 2024 as a blow to future generations and financial support.

“In many ways, it has become more challenging to be an artist in Philly. But the good-



Photo courtesy of FringeArts

Fail Happy Productions' "Mae West: The Comeback Tour," is the only Circus Campus show recommended for ages 14 and up.

will and camaraderie and mentorship is the same," Bang-Jensen said.

### A city of makers and artists

Bang-Jensen came to Fringe in her current role in 2024, but has been a Fringe artist since attending her first show with professors from Swarthmore College. She said FringeArts shaped Philadelphia in her mind as a city of "makers and artists," and she was astounded by the diversity and scale of performances, from international tours to alternative basement performances. After graduation, she produced a show for Fringe as her first theater gig, and went on to contribute through roles with "devised theater" company Pig Iron and the Regional Tony Award-winning Wilma Theater.

Since the pandemic, Bang-Jensen said arts organizations are learning to support each other. In 2024, Fringe had the highest attendance in its history, showing its success since the pandemic, especially among under-35 attendees. Federal grants, a crucial part of FringeArts' budget, were denied under new federal guidelines. In response, FringeArts released a statement denouncing cuts based on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and affirming their commitment to supporting marginalized artists.

"We're recognizing now we all rise in circles," Bang-Jensen said. "We're all part of making the ecosystem what it is in order for Philadelphia to be a sustainable place for artists and also an exciting place for audiences."

In the past five years, Fringe has focused on developing its hubs, performance spaces hosted across Philadelphia's neighborhoods. This year brings three new hubs: Studio 34 in West Phil-



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adelphia, Dumb Hub in Fishtown (named for its clowns and comedy shows), and Sawubona Creativity Project in South Philadelphia. This year, each hub receives financial support in exchange for volunteering their space.

### To each their own hub

Bang-Jensen said the hubs reflect the character of each neighborhood. Dumb Hub is risky, experimental, and adult, reflecting the area’s millennial and Gen Z population. Circus Campus is family-friendly given the number of young families in the area (Wendi Wynazz “Mae West: The Comeback Tour” is recommended for ages 14 and up).

As part of that family focus, Enchantment Theatre Company will perform “Mommy’s Khimar,” a show developed for the group’s Enchantment Everywhere program, which in the wake of budget cuts, brings art to schools. The show, based on a children’s book by Philadelphia author Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, follows a girl who embarks on magical adventures using her Muslim mom’s headscarf. This is Enchantment’s first year at Fringe after performing for 45 years as a company. As a touring group, they do not have a physical space except storage for their masks, puppets, costumes, and props. Enchantment Executive Director Zachary Chiero, who joined the theater in 2009, said schools do not need to provide anything but two electric sockets and any space, including hallways and lobbies.

Enchantment had its own National Endowment for the Arts funding pulled this year, along with many other theater companies, but is raising money through grassroots efforts and collaborations with other organizations. Chiero, who has performed at the Fringe with other theaters, believes Philadelphia has the “most iconic” Fringe festival in the country and is excited to continue the partnership with Enchantment in the future.

“We have such a desire to band together, to continue telling stories, and to really connect with our audiences again; to make people feel safe and comfortable coming out, participating, and having the opportunity to not only escape, but also to be changed by the art that they see,” Chiero said. “Arts can be a really useful tool in reflecting society or things that are happening in the world at the current moment, and it feels very much like all of us, no matter what our discipline is, have decided to take up that mantle proudly.”

FringeArts’ Mt. Airy Circus Hub is at 6452 Greene St., Mt. Airy. For more information and tickets, contact 215-413-1318 or [philly-fringe.org](http://philly-fringe.org). ■



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# Lebanon Valley combines history, agriculture, family fun, and adventure

Once the beach blankets, folding chairs, and coolers are stored after a sweltering summer, fall is the perfect time to enjoy a quick getaway. Just 90 minutes from Philadelphia, Lebanon Valley offers plenty of activities for all ages to enjoy. Plus, the drive from Philadelphia provides striking autumn views, with hills and valleys covered in orange, red, and gold leaves.

For Jennifer Kuzo, president of Visit Lebanon Valley, the region's rich agricultural heritage headlines autumn's appeal.

"Lebanon Valley is a major agricultural center," Kuzo exclaims with a hint of pride. "Picking up farm fresh fruit and produce at one of our roadside stands along the way is an essential part of any visit to our area."

In autumn, chances are that fruit will be apples and pumpkins. With cooler days and nights, the allure becomes apples in the press, (think cider), and pumpkins in the pie, as well as brilliant foliage against a mint blue sky.

### Apples, pumpkins, and pies, oh my!

One place sure to please a hankering for crisp apples is Seyfert Orchards. During the summer months, the orchards are known for their sweet and sour cherries, plums, peaches, and pears, but come fall, apples — such as their signature Winesap Gala, and the newer Sun Crisp and Honey Crisp varieties — are a draw for locals and visitors alike.

Seyfert's enjoys a colorful history. Begun in the 1920s by Dutch immigrant Andrew Seyfert, the orchards have survived and thrived under multiple generations of family members who continue the legacy of their ancestor. If you're planning a trip this fall, the weekend of Oct. 3 and 4 brings the farm's two-day autumn baked goods sale of apple crisps, apple dumplings, pies, and other homemade treats.

You might need something to wash down all that pie, so a stop at Gray's Apple Ridge Orchard, offering eight different varieties of apples, and a cider press used to make their own delicious apple cider, is in order. Part of the fun at Gray's is picking your own apples and a pumpkin or two.

If the family needs a little more activity, Riss-





By **SUSAN SCHAEFER**

Photo courtesy of Jennifer Kuzo, president, Visit Lebanon Valley

er-Marvel Farm Market not only has a pumpkin patch but also a virtual cornucopia of fun fall activities including a corn and a hay maze, tractor-pulled hayrides, and a trike track. And you won't go home empty-handed. Its market features an array of seasonal fresh produce, locally baked goods, jarred items, and a fridge full of local meat and dairy products.

Not to be missed when autumn leaves came tumbling down was the Alexander Schaeffer Farm's Harvest Fair and Early American Craft Show, which ran September 13 and 14. Here, history came to life with period artisans, crafts, cooking, farm life demonstrations, and yes, more cider pressing. A self-guided tour of the Historic Schaeffer House and Heirloom Garden prepared visitors to experience the rich history of the area.

### Indigenous and Civil War History

Prior to European settlement, the Lebanon Valley was inhabited by Indigenous nations including the Shawnee, Susquehannock, Gawanese, Nanticoke, and Leni-Lenape, or Delaware, peoples. Disgracefully, the Lenape lost all claim to the terrain they inhabited for centuries in the fraudulent "Walking Purchase" deed of 1737. After purchase agreements with William Penn, the Lenape moved outward, but soon these lands were claimed by growing numbers of European settlers in the country-



Photo above and at right courtesy of Jennifer Kuzo, president, Visit Lebanon Valley

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Photo by Courtney Haldeman Photography

On facing page: The Cornwall Iron Furnace, built in 1742, was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 2001.

Above left: A child is fascinated by the cider press at Gray's Apple Ridge.

Above right: Blossoms abound at Royal Oaks Flower Farm.

On page 56: Mom and kids enjoy the pumpkins, gourds, and of course, apples at Seyfert Orchards.

side around William Penn's Philadelphia.

Lebanon Valley's European settlement began around 1720, with German immigrants establishing the farms and communities that remain hallmarks of the area. Many immigrants, especially the Pennsylvania Dutch (who were not actually Dutch, but got their name due to an Anglo misunderstanding of "Deutsch," meaning "German"), were attracted by the region's fertile limestone soil, which was similar to that found in Germany.

### Time-travel tours

For a unique glimpse of the area's American history, imagine a tall, dashing figure dismounting from a glorious steed to examine the workings of Lebanon Valley's legendary Cornwall Iron Furnace. Well before the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, Gen. George Washington, hero of the Revolutionary War and our nation's first president, would have observed a massive operation that contributed greatly to the Continental Army prevailing over the British. It is widely held that Washington visited Cornwall Iron Furnace to survey this clever community where forest, stream, and entrepreneurial spirit combined to produce the iron used in weapons, tools, horseshoes, and even camp equipment.

Lebanon Valley denizens demonstrated ear-



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## Pick your own adventure in the Lebanon Valley

Nestled in the hills of Central Pennsylvania, between Hershey and Lancaster, the Lebanon Valley offers hand-picked adventures. From hand-picking flowers to tree-ripened fruit to choosing the next trail on your afternoon hike, the decision is all yours when it comes to your next adventure here in the Valley—we'll simply provide fantastic options!



your adventure awaits



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ly colonial defiance. Cornwall, along with other Pennsylvania furnaces, were true and early patriots, defying Britain's infamous Iron Act — designed to restrict iron production in the colonies. Cornwall served as a lifeline for the colonists in their fight for freedom.

The autumn Burd Coleman Village Walking Tour on Saturday, Oct. 4, could be just the thing for an in-depth exploration of local history. Historians Sue Wentzel and Mike Trump will lead participants on a walk among quaint stone structures, sharing the village's history, relationship to the Cornwall mines, and information about the architecture of some of its unique homes and businesses. The one-hour tours are a bargain at \$5 a ticket, (children under two are free). But spots are limited, so it is advised to preregister by calling the Furnace. All proceeds benefit the Friends of Cornwall Iron Furnace.

### Fall flower frenzy

Perhaps you're looking for something a bit more laid back during your Lebanon Valley visit. Elizabeth Ziegler, proprietor of Royal Oaks flower farm, has the answer. "Our gardens are open for picking and exploring now through the first frost, which typically happens around mid-October," she explains.

Ziegler recommends planning to spend one or two hours strolling through the garden rows,

enjoying the flowers, and maybe even packing a picnic. "We have a playset for children and picnic tables for relaxing, so it's a great stop for families or anyone looking to slow down and enjoy nature."

In her youth, Ziegler contributed to her mother's roadside flower stand and spent many summers cultivating the garden. These early experiences profoundly influenced her perspective. As a parent, she aimed to create an

enterprise with a strong community orientation — a space not only dedicated to flower picking but also to facilitating meaningful interactions with nature, educational opportunities about plant life, and providing a tranquil, inspiring setting. Royal Oaks has no admission fee, and everything is self-serve and easy to navigate. "We just kindly ask that each group purchase flowers during their visit," Ziegler said. "We provide jars, buckets, water, snip-

## Lebanon Valley attractions

Seyfert Orchards, 1050 Mt. Zion Rd., Lebanon, (717) 272-2966, seyfertorchards.com

Gray's Apple Ridge, 144 Greble Rd., Jonestown, (717) 865-3997, graysappleridge.com

Risser-Marvel Farm Market, 2425 Horseshoe Pike, Annville, (717) 838-1438, rissermarvel.com

Cornwall Iron Furnace, 94 Rexmont Rd., Cornwall, (717) 272-9711, cornwallironfurnace.org

Royal Oaks Flower Farm, 3615 Oak St., Lebanon, (717) 769-5015, theroyaloaksfarm.com

Lebanon Valley Craft Brewery, 840 N. 7th St., Lebanon, (717) 272-2869, lvcraftbrew.com

Snitz Creek Brewery, 7 N. 9th St., Lebanon, (717) 450-4467, snitzcreekbrewery.com

Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire Mount Hope Estate & Winery, 2775 Lebanon Rd., Manheim, (717) 665-7021, parenfaire.com

Porch & Pantry, 106 Chautauqua Dr., Mt. Gretna, (717) 964-3771, porchandpantry.com

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pers, and clear instructions in the potting shed, which is located beside the large stone parking area." Photography is always welcome and encouraged. U-Pick Garden hours are Monday through Saturday, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

No fall visit to the valley is complete without checking out Oktoberfest events at Lebanon Valley Craft Brewery, Snitz Creek Brewery (which offers an endlessly creative mix of new, unusual flavors and old favorites), or the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire. The Elmer C. Ebling Memorial Charity, Inc. also hosts an Oktoberfest at Myerstown Community Park from October 11 to 13.

If you're still standing after hoisting your beer steins, you can hoist your bikes off the rack or dust off your sneakers to explore the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail that travels for 19.6 miles in three distinct segments. But beware of bumps; a majority of the route is unpaved, mostly gravel-surfaced, except for a four-mile paved section.

Visit Lebanon Valley president Kuzo says her ideal day includes a bike ride on the Rail Trail, breakfast to try the seasonal menu at Mt. Gretna's Porch & Pantry, and a concert or theater production in Mt. Gretna (the Mount Gretna Playhouse season has ended; Gretna Music's season ends Sept. 13).

Lebanon Valley's website, [visitlebanonvalley.com](http://visitlebanonvalley.com), features many resources to assist in planning a weekend or day trip. Happy trails to you. ■



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Conceived during the pandemic shutdown and debuting in December 2020, *Wissahickon* was the publishing version of a COVID baby. The mission of our first issue was to re-establish connections within the community, which was still battling the isolation of the pandemic's pre-vaccine days.

We hope the articles we feature continue to bring our readers a sense of connection to their community.

In each issue, we strive to highlight stories about the people, places, arts, and activities that make the Wissahickon Valley a unique place to live.

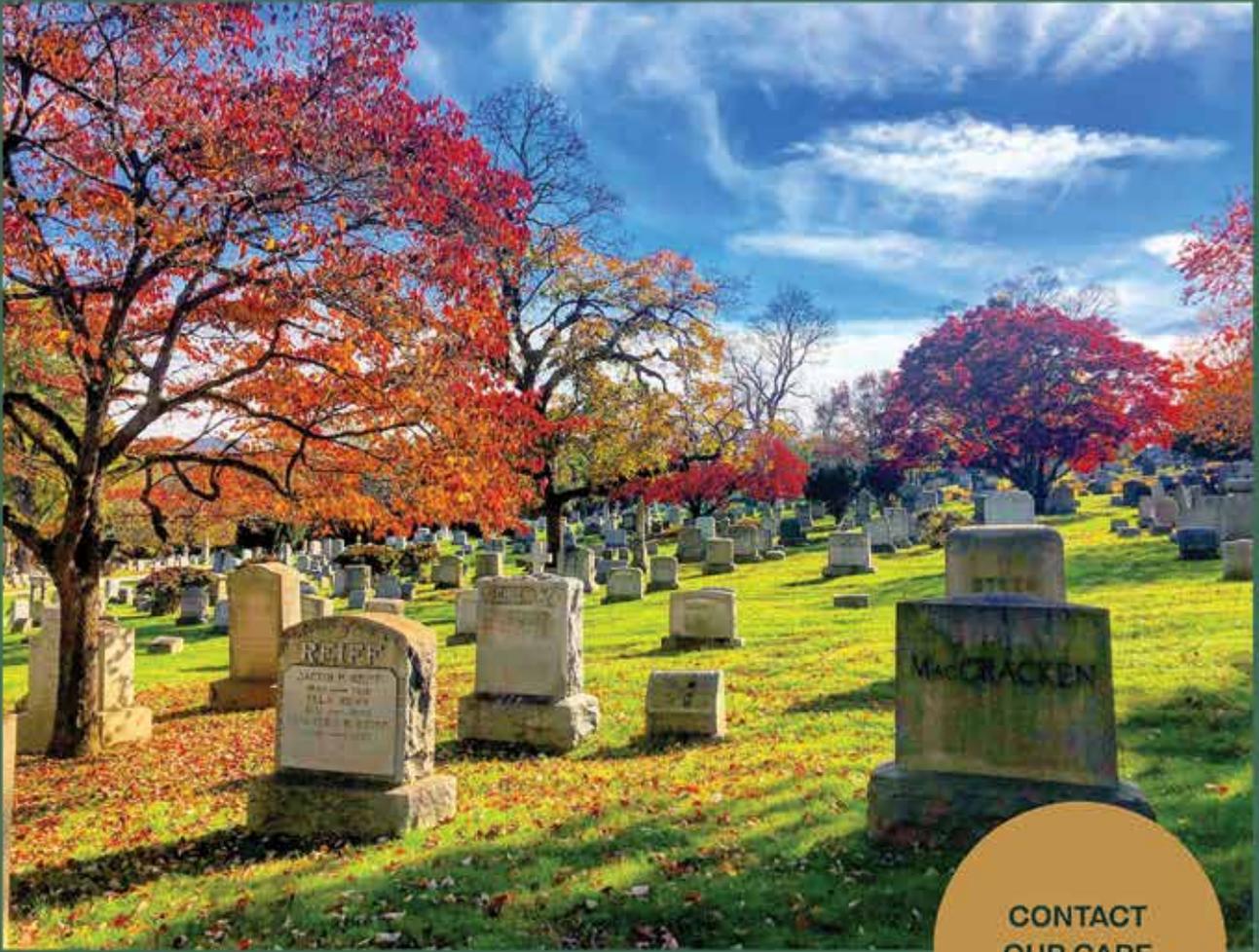
Our winter issue will be available in early December.

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