

NEWS

MEMBERSHIP THANK YOU DRAWING

Everybody is a Winner when they Support the Friends of High School Park!

Bring this coupon to the Membership Table at Arts in the Park to enter the membership thank you drawing (open to all current and renewing members). Prizes include \$500 retail value bicycle, Hiway Theater Family Membership, restaurant gift certificates, and more!

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Friends of High School Park invite you to begin or renew your membership. Join our efforts to beautify and appreciate our 11-acre, native species park.

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

\$25 Individual Membership \$40 Family Membership Membership Renewal
 Additional Contribution Enclosed: \$10 \$35 \$75 \$100 Other

Cash
 Check

This gift is in honor or memory of _____

This gift is given anonymously, please do not list my name in the newsletter.

Please make checks payable to: **Friends of High School Park** All contributions are tax-deductible.

Members and volunteers enjoy the camaraderie of working together and of attending educational programs. Please check any activity in which you have interest:

Arts in the Park Communications Education Fundraising Adopt a Plot
 Membership Restoration Work Days Plant Enthusiasts Program

MAIL YOUR DUES AND/OR CONTRIBUTION TO: FRIENDS OF HIGH SCHOOL PARK • 7910 MONTGOMERY AVE • ELKINS PARK, PA 19027

Thank you very much! You will receive our newsletter announcing events and activities in the park.



FRIENDS OF
High School Park

**7910 Montgomery Ave
Elkins Park, PA 19027
215-782-8082**

www.highschoolpark.org



The Friends of High School Park is now on Facebook! Please visit us and become a fan.



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TO REACH FHSP

www.highschoolpark.org

215-782-8082

7910 Montgomery Avenue

Elkins Park PA 19027

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- Parks Increase Property Value

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

By Robin Eisman

Arts in the Park!



2009 Arts in the Park.

Can you believe Arts in the Park (AIP) will be 15 years old this spring?! Its growth in both years and popularity has made us reflect on the history of this beloved annual fair that has continued to benefit the park while offering a wonderful showcase of neighborhood talent.

AIP got its start in 1996 as a way to publicize and raise funds for this newly established Cheltenham Township park. (It was named High School Park to honor the high school building that had once graced the site and been destroyed in a fire.) The group that coalesced around this burned-out property was made up largely of immediate neighbors and was then called the Friends of High School Park Organizing Committee.

At that point, the idea of restoring the native vegetation of the park had not yet been established as its primary goal—in fact, the committee members were still debating whether the primary focus should be arts or ecology, whether to have athletic fields, and how to use the land in general. No one at that point envisioned the oasis of restored streambanks, woodland and meadows that this would become (and is still becoming), or the evolution of AIP into a much-beloved neighborhood tradition.

Planning for the first AIP, held in May, began only in March. The late Marjorie Bayersdorfer, an advocate for restoring native vegetation to the park, approached a friend and local artist, Joye Schwartz, about holding an event in the nascent park. Joye suggested having a professional art exhibit on the grounds of the park, and organized the arts part of the festival. She notes that her artist friends agreed to exhibit there as a favor to her—a far cry from today, when artists pay to enter a juried contest for a limited number of exhibit booths (about 50). In addition to the art show that first year, there were also a clown, enough food to keep attendees and volunteers fed (ice cream, pizza and lemonade), a plant sale, and that quintessential feature of fundraisers, a bake sale. A public election for a president and board of directors of the group, by now called Friends of High School Park (FHSP), was held as well. For many attendees, who were former students at the high school or former residents of the neighborhood, this event also became a heartwarming reunion.

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President's Letter, Spring 2010

What a joy to be walking through High School Park and seeing the first signs of spring peeking through places so recently covered with snow! And what a spring and year it will be in the park.

Not only will we be celebrating the milestone 15th Arts in the Park festival on June 6th, but we will be making great progress on a couple of large projects in the restoration of the park. Those include:

- Continuation of the development of the native plant demonstration garden, beginning with the replacement of the damaged fence along the parking lot. This work is being done with Cheltenham Township support.
- Initiating the three-year meadow restoration – most likely starting with the edge areas, now that we have a state of Pennsylvania grant to help us with this work. (See the article about the grant in this newsletter.)
- Continuation of the invasive cleanout and the planting of some additional native trees on the hillside

None of this would be happening without the tireless support of our volunteers, the excellent collaboration with the Township in our efforts, our very dedicated staff and the many enthusiastic "friends" of High School Park. So thank you all....you are making a positive difference in the park and the community at large.

As for me, this is my first year as president and I am most grateful for those who preceded me in this role. They have created an organization that is focused, efficient, and assures that this park habitat will exist for a very long time. We have a talented and hard working Board of Directors. And, thanks to Amy Steffen's eight years of vision and action, we also have two terrific staff people (Gina Craigo and Diana K. Weiner) and an office space,

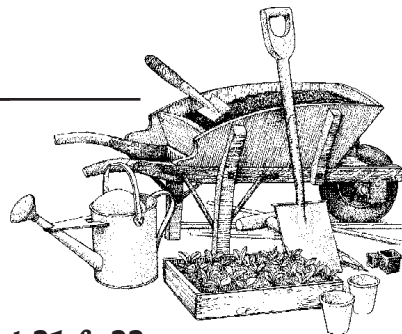
BREAK SOME GROUND!

Now that the plants are waking up from their winter sleep, it's time for us to roll up our sleeves and get down and dirty! Come join us as we weed and plant and do whatever else it takes to restore and help maintain our natural refuge. Friends of High School Park's upcoming weekend work days at the park will be held from 1:00 – 3:00pm on the following dates:

**May 15 & 16 • July 10 & 11 • July 24 & 25 • August 7 & 8 • August 21 & 22
September 25 & 26 • October 2 & 3 • October 23 & 24 • November 6 & 7**

Meet us at the shed, located on the upper portion of the park near the Harrison Street Commuter Parking Lot. Wear long pants and comfortable shoes. Bring work gloves if you have them.

HELP US PLANT, PRESERVE AND PROTECT!



By Martha Mowry

which has made a huge difference in their/our ability to coordinate and manage.

Speaking of the Board, we started 2010 with four new and talented board members: Sue Aistrop, Howard Soloman, Robin Minkoff and Robin Eisman. (See the article about new board members in this newsletter.) Their impact has already been felt and they will undoubtedly make many positive contributions. Unfortunately that also means that we lost three members: Ronna Kassel, Jamie Lemish and Amy Steffen. While they will be missed, all continue to be active in FHSP in one way or another, and we thank them for their previous and continuing service.

MY GOALS FOR 2010 ARE TO:

- Keep us all focused – we've made some recent revisions to the organizational structure to better reflect our current and future needs, so there is some transitioning happening
- Support the three standing committees (Development, Marketing and Park Restoration & Maintenance) in enhancing their effectiveness and reach
- Make the 15th Arts In the Park (can you believe it?!!) the best ever
- Assure the continuation of the organization through sound fiscal management and additional fund raising
- Be a sponge for new and creative ideas/projects that will further enhance the park, community education, public awareness and enjoyment
- Be a constant reminder to all that this community is seriously enhanced by the presence and beauty of this park

So, I hope to see you all in the park and, of course, at Arts in the Park. I feel lucky to be associated with this organization and even luckier to have landed in this community where people are invested in the environment and each other.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Friends of High School Park is a non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to create, manage and preserve a viable native ecosystem in High School Park for the enjoyment of the community, in cooperation with Cheltenham Township. We are dedicated to inspiring the community to connect with others and the natural environment through service and learning connected with the park.

FHSP Friend List *from page 10*

Thank you also to the several people who made contributions in honor or memory of a loved one:

IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF:

Lois Boxley
Buddy and Belle Dzubow
Elizabeth Farnsworth and Aaron Ellison Jakes
Gail Kogen Gottlieb
Jakes
Margie Patlak and Gail Korostoff
Martha Mowry
CJ Smith and Dave Robinson

SUBMITTED BY:

Marlene & Alan Grolnic
Leslie and Rick Dzubow
Elaine Ellison
Florence Kogen
Bernard Handler
Deborah Meyer
Jackie McClellan
Iris and Kevin Parker

The below made contributions in memory of our long-time volunteer and much loved friend, CJ Smith:

Joe and Roseanne Serowatka
Claire Meyer

Margie Patlak
Rifkin-Silverman Family

Drusilla Buscemi
Andrew, Sophie and Eli Cassel

Cindy Little

GIVE THE GIFT OF FHSP MEMBERSHIP!

Surprise your favorite nature and community enthusiast with a lasting, meaningful gift...

Give the gift of year-round enjoyment—membership to the Friends of High School Park! Membership benefits include a bi-annual newsletter and other communications, free admission to our Programs in the Park, and the civic pride of supporting your community park!

Consider celebrating important occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries and holidays; or remembering a loved one who has passed away by donating to the Friends of High School Park. Memberships are \$25 for

individuals and \$40 for a family (which includes a FHSP promo item).

Simply note the occasion and we will send a formal acknowledgement to the recipient you name on the completed form (amounts of gifts are not given).

Donors like you make it possible for us to build a park where the beauty of nature can be enjoyed for many generations.

COMPLETE THIS FORM AND MAIL IT WITH YOUR CHECK TO: FHSP, 7910 MONTGOMERY AVENUE, ELKINS PARK PA 19027

Gift amount: \$ _____ (please make check payable to FHSP)

Send Gift Acknowledgement To:

Gift made by: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Email Address: _____

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX:

Gift membership (\$25/\$40) Wedding Birthday Anniversary Christmas Channukah Other: _____
 Memorial • Name of deceased: _____ In Honor of • Name of honoree: _____

FHSP Friend List*

We are grateful for the tremendous support from our individual, family, and business members. Current Friends are:

NEW FRIENDS

Curt Broad, Carol Sirton-Broad
and Rita Broad
Miriam Einhorn
Harriet Goldstein
Robert and Sabina Graebner
Mark and Alicia Greenberg
Pastor John Holt
Philip and Pamela Kates
Harold Kessler
Irving and Ethel Korostoff
Timothy Kolman and Rebecca
Landes
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Craig and Sharon Myers
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Ilene and Marshall Schafer
Joe and Roseanne Serowatka
Howard Soloman
Fred Strober
Diana K. Weiner

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Waxman
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Cynthia Blackwood, The Frame
House
Tom and Ann Bowman
Ronnie and Alan Bronstein
Beth Brooks and Robert Waterston
Stephen Buckingham

Greta Bunin, Andrew Gale and
Susannah Gale
Drusilla Buscemi
Larry and Dina Caroline
Alison Carson and Neal Siegel
Andrew Cassel
Shelley and David Chamberlain
Susan and Larry Chirlin
David Cohen
Jean Cornelius
Marc and Nancy Cortez
Gina and Ben Craig
Neile and Art Davis
Beth and Peter Denitz
Lois Dicker
Sandy and Tony DiGiulio
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Robin Eisman
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Laura and Thomas Fiegel
Bernard Fischer
Marsha and Robert Fischer
Anita and Howard Fishman
Mitchell Freedman
Freimiller Family
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Schek
Ellen Friedman and Jeff Cohen
Iris and Michael Gaines
Karen Getzen
Louise and Myron Goldman
Cindy Goodman
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Dennis Graber
Emily and Howard Greenberg
Leba Grodinsky
Marlene and Alan Grolnic
Ayala and Hanoah Guy
Bruce Guzzi and Patricia Deshon
Bernard Handler
Sherry Hanley
Marilyn Harris
Joan and Richard Heller
Margaret and James Hennessey
Susan and Howard Hoffman

John Hoover, Jr.
Lynn and Ivan Horn
Hydro-Loc, Carolyn Myers
Eric Johnston
Karin and Mark Kaplan
David Kary
Ronna and Barry Kassel
Kassutto Family
David Katz
Florence Kogen
Patricia and Roger Kohn
Steve Koniers and Eunice Cuirle
Deborah Kotzin and Jerome Verlin
Ronald and Lisa Krader
Marlis Kraft-Zemel and Martha
Platt
Robert Kravis
Julie Kring-Schreifels
Aaron and Sora Landes
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Barbara Lember
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Dorothy Magen
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Terry and Jeffrey Muldawer
Margaret Mulligan
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Linda Nesvisky
Lane Neubauer and Mark
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Lisa and Michael Oswald
Marjorie and Martin Parelman
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Andrea and Michael Rieder
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Carol Shackmaster
Phyllis Sichel
Meryl Silver
Moriah Simon and Shawn Hazani
Janis Smith and Shimon Waldfogel
Liz and Bob Solms
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Louise Sussman
Anusuya and Chamegowda
Thimmegowda
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Jennifer and Dan Wasserman,
Lily and Henry
Linda Watson-Patterson
Ellen Weaver
Susan and Marvin Weinberg
Deborah Weinstock-McCurdy
and Glenn McCurdy
Beth Yount and Ron Lebovits
Lydia and James Zappacosta
Babette Zemel

*Please note that membership renewals are currently sent twice per year. If you're not sure of your renewal date, please check the bottom of the mailing label on this newsletter, the date you last renewed will be indicated. You may renew at anytime!

Meet our new Board Members

We are excited about the new members on our Board of Directors and how they will help High School Park grow:

SUE AISTROP

Sue Aistrop is currently Executive Assistant at Marguerite Rodgers, Ltd, an interior design firm in Philadelphia. She has 15 years experience working with non-profit organizations, including MANNA, Jewish Community Centers, and AIDS Fund. For these organizations, she has done marketing, event-planning, volunteer recruitment, and financial management. Sue looks forward to tapping those skills as an active planner and participant in Arts in the Park, and as a participant on the Marketing Committee of FHSP.

A number of roads led Sue to FHSP. She has enjoyed the park "as a great spot in the neighborhood to walk my dog," she said, and has both attended and volunteered at Arts in the Park. Sue also noted that she had a rewarding friendship with Marjorie Bayersdorfer, a former FHSP board member, who "was a big influence in my interest in native plants, and a contributor of those plants to my own garden."

ROBIN EISMAN

Robin Eisman describes herself as a native Philadelphian who's lived in the Tookany and Pennypack watersheds most of her life. "I developed an early love of nature by being taken as a child to Pennypack Park and Curtis Arboretum," Robin said. Her graduate training was in genetics research at the University of Pennsylvania, and she now works part-time as a medical writer for a pharmaceutical company.

Robin has done field work, as both a volunteer and paid consultant, on improving wetland habitat for an endangered turtle species, and developing a habitat management plan for a small section of French Creek State Park. She also did educational outreach for the North American Pollinator Protection Council, "which greatly heightened my awareness of the critical interdependence of pollinators (mostly insects) and their plant hosts," Robin said.

Other environmental projects Robin has worked on include coordinating the voluntary corner recycling program in her former West Philly neighborhood (before mandatory curbside recycling). She served on the Boards of Directors of that neighborhood and on the Clean Air Council. Currently, she takes care of a "vest-pocket park" near her home in Abington Township, where she has been planting primarily native species. Robin has walked and volunteered at High School Park for a number of years, and has been "very impressed with the dedication of FHSP's organizers/ volunteers and the results the organization has produced," Robin said, adding, "I hope to help FHSP expand its efforts and continue



New Board members, l to r: Robin Eisman, Sue Aistrop, Robin Minkoff and Howard Soloman.

to maintain and restore this small gem that serves as a wonderful example of both volunteerism and the benefits of suburban habitat restoration."

ROBIN MINKOFF

Robin Minkoff has more than 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector working in fundraising and management roles. She currently serves as Associate Director of Moving Traditions (www.movingtraditions.org), a national Jewish organization that seeks to make Judaism more resonant in contemporary life. Robin previously worked for the Development Corporation for Israel, Anti-Defamation League, Albert Einstein Medical Center, and the Jewish Publication Society. She has a B.A. in sociology, an M.S.W., and an M.A. in Jewish History.

In addition to appreciating and enjoying the physical beauty of High School Park, Robin and her family have a strong interest in its future, as their backyard adjoins its property. She is interested in the vitality of FHSP, and looks forward to bringing her finance, administration, development and human resources skills to enhance its organizational strength.

HOWARD SOLOMAN

Howard Soloman is an attorney who practices in the areas of taxation, estate planning, eldercare, long term care planning, estate administration, and small business planning. He has served as a Board member for various charitable organizations, including Philabundance, Friends of Briar Bush Nature Center, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and Volunteers for the Indigent Program. Howard is currently a member of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of Beth Shalom Congregation.

Howard lives in Wyncote and noted that "High School Park always has been on my radar as a neighborhood treasure, but my desire to become more involved was heightened recently when a couple of the Scouts in my Boy Scout Troop decided to do projects for the Park. Among other things, it is my hope that I can forge a continuing relationship between the Park and the Troop."

Happy Birthday Arts in the Park from page 1

Rosemary Porter, who helped put together that first AIP, marveled at how quickly the event was organized that first year. Others who helped organize and run that first festival (or the first few), or provided neighborly assistance, were the late Joe Burke and June Gaul (who provided much of the momentum), Adam Corsen-Finnerty, Florence Kogan, Evie Berger, Lucy Agharzarian, Rose and Alex Sluzas, Reid Overturf, Joanne Karpowitz, Lisa Friedland, Elaine Goodman, Sherrie Solow, Dennis Staples, Bill Wilkens, Jennifer Brandabour, Benjamin Laden (who has performed multiple times at the festival), and a host of other volunteers. The Harrison Ave. neighbors, who made up a large part of the Friends of High School Park Board of Directors, not only helped organize the event, they also provided electricity, water and bathroom facilities.

The enthusiastic response to that first event, plus the fact that it not only broke even but actually raised money, encouraged the Board and other organizers to continue the festival and to expand it over the years. By the second year, the art projects for children started to take on their present form, and music was added a year or two later. As the festival grew, organizers considered making it a two-day event, but decided to keep it on the first Sunday of June. One year, there was a fall festival, with Jeff Solow and his classical trio providing chamber music. The pioneering organizers passed the torch to Adam Hoffman, originally recruited to use his professional expertise to set up the sound system. Later organizers were Amy Steffen, who also served as president of FHSP for many years, Caroline Stritzinger, also a long-term board member, and now, Gina Craig, the operations manager for FHSP. All of these individuals put huge amounts of time and effort into this neighborhood event and fundraiser over the last 15 years, and additional hundreds of dedicated volunteers have worked at the festival itself and behind the scenes.

AIP grew by leaps and bounds in the early 2000s, with music provided by professional bands that were paid, an expanded selection of food vendors, bigger plant sales, a plethora of activities (the haywagon, provided by the township, and face-painting that have since become staples, a fire truck, visits by the Philadelphia Zoo, Elmwood Park Zoo, and SPCA, mimes and street performers, etc), and, of course, bigger crowds. A much larger fraction of the proceeds began to come from commercial sponsors in exchange for publicity (Einstein Hospital, for example, has been one of the primary sponsors). Open-sided tents were added (and also became fundraisers, with companies' names attached to them); these not only provided shade, encouraging attendees to stay longer, but became focal points for various activities.

All of this entailed much more organizing and planning, of course – Joye, Rosemary and Adam recall that organizing the festival became practically a full-time job. The Board came to the conclusion that while the festival could continue to expand, and perhaps bring in even more money, its volunteers were burning out from the massive effort. By about 2003, when the festival was rained out, greatly disappointing the artists and craftspeople, not to mention organizers and would-be attendees, it was decided to both forgo any further expansion of the event and to have a rain date. At about that point, most of the paid professional musicians were replaced by local musicians who played for free after a selection process. Many of these talented locals came from Cheltenham public school bands and choirs, and all helped draw their friends and family to AIP. Having local young people perform was also intended to create (or strengthen) their connection to the park and to the festival.

From a personal standpoint, I remember being absolutely thrilled when I first discovered AIP some years ago, as was my younger son, who insisted one year on being taken even though we had to rush off to get to his own birthday party later that day. The event is a wonderful combination of county fair, giant block party, arts festival, and outdoor concert. There are similar events around Philly and elsewhere, but none I know of that have such a broad palette of activities and interests in such an intimate, neighborly atmosphere. Happy 15th, and here's to a successful 2010 AIP and many more!

[Note: This history is primarily from personal remembrances of several of the event organizers; there are various versions of some parts of this history. I also assume that I wasn't aware of others who contributed significantly, and apologize to anyone I've left out or whose contribution I've minimized. There will be a "memory book" available at this year's AIP – at the FHSP membership booth – for attendees to record their memories of working on the festival and of the event itself over the years.]



Kids Crafts are always a popular event each year at Arts in the Park.

Tales from the Trails

By Diana K. Weiner

This past winter was a doozy! I am not sure, but maybe it is because I was born smack dab in the middle of December. Why else would snow and ice follow me in every professional endeavor I undertake? February 10th brought one of many great storms to our area. As heavy ice and snow accumulated in the early morning hours branches started to bend. As more snow accumulated during the day, those dangerously bent branches were now fully bent trees and shrubs. By mid-day the outdoors certainly looked like a winter wonderland. It was hard to distinguish shoveled and plowed piles from plants!

Fortunately, High School Park fared very well, despite the winter blizzard. Like those in other areas, the pine trees at the park succumbed to the weighty snow. Many branches broke off the pines between High School Road and Alumni Path, but no grave harm was done, and the park may actually benefit from the snow in the long run. Farmers and horticulturists alike appreciate the snow as an insulation blanket for our plants. It is referred to as "poor man's fertilizer" bringing free nitrogen to the earth. And it actually contains more of that now than it has in the past because of acid rain. The content of nitrogen and sulfur and some other elements has increased over the last several decades, and has been considered a problem in terms of acidification of soils. But, in soils that we use for gardens and lawns, usually there's a shortage of nitrogen, so that input can be helpful.

Spring will be "pick up sticks" and pruning time for many people, in their own yards and for the volunteers in our park, after this last winter of heavy snow. This will be my first spring at the park. I am excited to see the bloodroot popping up, and to search

for foamflower and hepatica. Many hours were spent clearing invasive honeysuckle, tree of heaven, oriental bittersweet, wineberry and English ivy from Alumni Path last fall. It was the ideal time to perform this immense task. The spring wildflowers were dormant, so stepping over their territory was not destructive to them. Now, as you amble down the path, you can appreciate the grand trees planted for the old school decades ago. This area will be first on the list for Adopt-A-Plot members. This new program will allow our friends who use and appreciate the park to give back in a more personal way, with care and commitment. (See "Adopt a Plot in the Park" below)

The snow did put a damper on our first Plant Enthusiasts program. Yes, that was scheduled for February 10th! The rescheduled meeting was well attended, and the next three programs are set to get us all through spring. (See "Upcoming Programs in the Park," pg.7) The evening programs combine a one-hour presentation on a literally green theme with time to meet new people, reminisce with old friends and enjoy having your gardening questions answered by knowledgeable and notable horticulturists in the Philadelphia area (and beyond!).

We have applied for several grants for the park. If all goes well we will be planting 158 trees and shrubs along with many grasses, sedges, wildflowers and other perennials! We have been preparing for this all last fall. The slate is clean and we are looking forward to planting and tending the new Native Plant Demonstration Bed, Alumni Path and most importantly the meadow and edge community. Hope to see you in the park!

Adopt a Plot in High School Park

By Diana K. Weiner

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY WILL BE TO:

- Initially, visit your plot often and observe what is growing there. Once all of the plants in your 10' by 10' plot are identified, we can pinpoint the invasive exotic species and weed them out using a variety of environmentally sound practices.
- Plant native trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses and annual wildflowers, depending on your chosen site. Our plan gives us many choices of plant material that can be used in each area of the park.

Here's your big chance to make a difference in your own neighborhood, while learning more about native plant restoration. If all of our members would adopt just one small plot of our precious 11.5 acre native plant sanctuary, the workload would be manageable and our 10 Year Ecological Management Plan vision will become a reality.

Call or email us today to make an appointment to pick your own piece of the park today!

Want some hands-on experience doing native plant restoration? Then we'd love to have you sign up for our new Adopt-a-Plot program at High School Park. With this program, you can make your mark in the park by tending to your own 10 feet by 10 feet section. No experience in gardening or native plants is required, just membership in Friends of High School Park and a devotion to our important mission to restore and maintain the park as a natural ecosystem.

We are currently concentrating on Alumni Path, the meadow, and the edge community around the perimeter of the meadow. Check your calendar and we will meet you in the park and visit your favorite location. We will explain the options for the area of your choice. Then, we will give you personal instruction for tending your space through the seasons. Together we will identify what is growing in your plot, and then create and implement a plan for replacing what should not be growing there (like invasive exotic plants) with a more natural palette of plants.

Where the Wild Things Are

By Margie Patlak

Although I like the spark of awe that gets struck whenever I see wildlife in my Elkins Park neighborhood, there is something disconcerting about seeing deer walking down my sidewalk, or a wild turkey scrounging around at my birdfeeder. I was greeted with both of these scenes recently, and I found it degrading to the animals, akin to seeing one of your neighbors transformed into a homeless person desperately seeking spare change.

But I guess you can't blame the animals—there's no place for them to go. Each new housing development that has come into our area over the last century has substantially shrunk the habitats of deer, foxes, and wild turkeys. Similarly, green way stations filled with the native berries and fruits birds like to dine on have become few and far between, and most wildflowers have been replaced by orderly rows of tulips and hedges.

As someone who grew up in a new housing development in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, I find this particularly disturbing. When I was a child, I saw nearby forests and fields rapidly being turned into neocolonial homes and lawns. The creeks in which I used to enjoy wading and panhandling for "gold" (pieces of sparkling mica) were all filled in. The tall meadow grasses that swayed with the wind and let us hide in between their stems were paved over. The bloodroot and Virginia bluebells that suddenly reappeared with the first warm weather of spring no longer showed up. Plot by plot, all the good climbing trees got cut down. Eventually, the once extensive natural areas where all us neighborhood kids would gather together to build twig forts, find Indian arrowheads, and carry out our make-believe play that let us soar out to places way beyond the orderly confines of our yards vanished, replaced by sterile new houses and highways. It wasn't just suburban sprawl, but a bona fide catastrophe for both the wildlife and the not yet tamed children that lived nearby.

I was so convinced that all the wild land in the world was disappearing, that the first few coins I earned doing odd jobs I put away to save some natural plot of earth from similar destruction. Years later, I was relieved to discover national and state parks that would never be developed. But these miles and miles of undisturbed landscapes would never quite make up for what was lost in my own neighborhood—a green escape within walking distance that I could come to on a daily basis.

I still find myself gravitating to the green spaces because of the way they put me in touch with a sphere that is much bigger than myself and the people around me. My personal problems become miniscule, if not forgotten, when I hear the nasal call of a nearby nuthatch, see a speckled frog hop into the creek, and smell the combined sweet scents of spring flowers. I thought maybe I

was somewhat unique in the way nature relaxed me, but one recent Dutch study found that people who live within a half mile of a park or wooded area are less anxious and depressed. My imagination isn't as active as it was when I was a child, but I find my "time-outs" in natural areas often result in new ideas and insights, and renew my sense of awe about the world around me.

That is why I feel so fortunate to have High School Park nearby. A natural oasis in the middle of a suburb, the park is a haven for wildlife, including foxes, turtles, and snakes. Even a statuesque great blue heron has been seen foraging for fish in the park's creek—a much more uplifting scene than a clumsy turkey at a birdfeeder. I hope as time goes by and neighborhood needs change, we all work together to continue to preserve this last remaining parcel of green in our midst—a place where the wild things are, including ourselves. So, I hope to see you all in the park and, of course, at Arts in the Park. I feel lucky to be associated with this organization and even luckier to have landed in this community where people are invested in the environment and each other.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Daniel Knipprath

Once upon a time it was Cheltenham High School. Now, we fight to keep High School Park from becoming an abandoned old lot. A big step in that direction was made by Friends of High School Park volunteer Daniel Knipprath. He noticed the old wire fence with cement posts peeking through giant six foot tall seedlings of tree of heaven and topped with strangling honeysuckle and bittersweet vines, and instead envisioned a path through the woods that highlighted the beautiful old Tulip Poplars. He spent 92 hours blazing Alumni Path to make that vision a reality, cutting down and removing invasive trees, shrubs and vines from the slope that connects the blacktop path above to the High School Rd. parking lot below.

Now bloodroot and other wildflowers will have more room to bloom there each spring, and the dogwood trees and winterberry shrubs along the path will thrive and provide a colorful understory spring through fall.

Come to the park to see the incredible job Daniel's done, and be awed by the ancient trees that are now visible and truly show the age and history of our incredible park.

Thank you Daniel!



PA Grants \$125K to Restore Meadow

By Sanna Levine

Our plans to restore the meadow at High School Park just got a big boost from the state of Pennsylvania. Cheltenham Township recently received a \$125 thousand grant from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) to restore this meadow ecosystem. The three-year project will replace invasive plant species in the meadow with native grasses and wildflowers. These native plants, once established, will require little to no pesticides and maintenance, and will prevent runoff from the park to the adjacent Tookany Creek.

C2P2 is administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The meadow project is one of about 150 projects the C2P2 funded from a grant budget of about \$20 million, after reviewing more than \$100 million in funding requests. The grant recognizes Friends of High School Park (FHSP)'s outstanding recreation and conservation work with the community.

The large meadow restoration grant is an example of the state of Pennsylvania's growing trend to fund "green" projects, which began about 10 years ago. FHSP has been ahead of the trend, having been founded in 1995 to restore and maintain the native plant ecosystem of High School Park as an outdoor sanctuary in Cheltenham.

"Pennsylvania is incentivizing communities to go green," said Tom Ford of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. The state is implementing a "green scorecard" for 2010 grant applications that gives points for repairing damaged ecosystems and protecting critical habitat and biodiversity, which is the focus of the meadow project.

The park's meadow project joins an international movement toward planting native species in public spaces, with the support of government and private institutions and organizations. Similar programs have put native species in the public spaces of San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, as well as in certain cities and towns in Europe and Australia.

Restoration of the meadow is part of the detailed restoration and management plan for High School Park that was developed in 2008 by Forbes Environmental and Land Use Planning firm with input from FHSP volunteers, township personnel, and other neighbors and residents. "Replacing the aggressive invasive plants in the meadow with native plants is an important step toward restoring the long-term ecological health" of the 11.5-acre park, noted Diana K. Weiner, Restoration Manager of Friends of High School Park (FHSP), which is implementing the meadow restoration project in coordination with Cheltenham Township.

"The financial, environmental, and quality of life benefits will be huge," Weiner said. "Native plants need little or no fertilizer or pesticides, which are expensive and toxic. They grow more slowly than the invasive species, and require less mowing, which saves labor and carbon dioxide emissions." They also don't create the dark cavernous spaces made by taller, woody invasive plants, or crowd out other species. An added benefit of native plants is that they will support the native food chain, drawing wildlife to the park.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The first phase of the project should begin in the fall of 2010. The first step will be to eradicate the existing invasive species in the front half of the meadow, and lay topsoil mixed with compost. Presently, too thin a layer of soil covers the original Cheltenham High School plot, in which the building was imploded in 1995.

After the thicker layer of topsoil and compost is laid, volunteers will plant warm season grass seed and plugs. In a year or two, when the grasses are firmly established, volunteers will add wildflowers. Next, the rear of the meadow will get the same treatment, overlapping work on the foremeadow.

"The park will look worse for a few months, then much better," said Amy Steffen, past president of FHSP and a key contributor to the grant application.

The project also will replace invasive species in High School Park's berms (the raised barrier around the park to prevent runoff to Tookany Creek) and edges (the transitional space between the meadow and the woods) with native plants.

"We're thrilled to have this funding to help us carry out these important restoration projects in the park," said Weiner.

Healthy Parks Increase Home Property Values

By Sanna Levine

Proximity to open park space offers more than the "soft" advantages of psychological repose and quality of life, according to studies and real estate experts.

"Properties abutting parks seem to have higher value," said Charlie Dorkey, an independent appraiser in Ardmore who has appraised Philadelphia-area properties since 1970. "Even in a supposedly bad market, homes within walking distance to parks sell faster, which correlates to higher resale value."

Rochelle Tuzman Sauber, of Weichert Realtors agrees. She has sold more than 600 homes in and around Cheltenham, and

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IN YOUR BACKYARD: Staghorn Sumac

By Diane Ehrlich

As you walk along the edge of the meadow in High School Park, you may have noticed the velvety stems and ruby red seed cones of an often under appreciated native plant. Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*) gets its common name from those soft, fuzzy branches which look like the velvet covered antlers of young male deer. More like a huge shrub than a tree, staghorn sumac can grow to over 20 feet high. This plant sends out vigorous suckers to form dense, expanding, multi-stemmed thickets. You can see our own sumac thickets on the edge of the hillside by the overlook area and on either side of the path that crosses the meadow on the upper level.

Staghorn sumac has large, coarse, roughly toothed leaves that resemble topical ferns. It puts on a spectacular show in the fall when the foliage turns intense shades of red, orange, and yellow. Pale yellowish-green, plume-like flower clusters appear in the summer. On the female plants, the flowers ripen into 6 inch long cones of tightly bunched, fuzzy, crimson fruits. These fruits are edible, but are quite sour. Some people steep them in hot water to make a kind of lemonade or tea. If you are not so adventurously inclined, you can simply admire these decorative fruits as they darken through the winter to a deep maroon.

Tough, drought tolerant, and pest resistant, staghorn sumac thrives in almost any soil, withstands a wide range of conditions, and tolerates extremes of heat and cold—although it does not like shade or wet soil. You can spot it growing in abandoned fields, along highways, and in other areas that many plants do not find so hospitable.

As a native plant, staghorn sumac is important to the ecology of our area. The dense thickets it forms offer shelter to small mammals. Its seeds and fruit are eaten by a variety of songbirds. Deer and rabbits browse on its leaves and twigs. The flowers produce abundant nectar for bees and other insects. Sumacs are also the primary host plant for the larvae of the red-banded hairstreak butterfly.

There are cultivars of staghorn sumac which can make lovely, bold additions to your garden, provided you have room for these large, fast growing plants. Cutleaf staghorn sumacs (*Rhus typhina* 'Laciniata' and *Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta') have leaves that are more deeply dissected than wild staghorn sumac, giving them a finer, more feathery texture. Tiger Eye sumac (*Rhus typhina* 'Tigereye Baitiger') has chartreuse foliage which is also more finely cut than the wild species. All the cultivars of stag-



Rhus typhina foliage and seed heads.

horn sumac have gorgeous, fiery fall foliage.

Staghorn sumac is an important member of the plant community which populates the "edge" ecosystem at High School Park. The edge ecosystem is composed of plants that form the transition from one ecosystem to another—in this case, the edge between the meadow and the hillside woodland. In the coming year, we will be working to restore our meadow and the edge that surrounds it to healthy native plant communities. We will be looking for tough, resilient, plants like staghorn sumac to anchor the soil and attract birds and insects. So the next time you stroll around the meadow in High School Park, look for this distinctive native plant with a new appreciation for the important role it plays in our landscape.

SECRET PLACES:

Amazing cultural sites and landscapes in Eastern Montgomery County just north of Philadelphia

- Abington Art Center
- Arcadia University Art Gallery & Grey Towers Castle
- Beth Sholom Synagogue
- Briar Bush Nature Center
- Bryn Athyn Cathedral
- Cairnwood Estate
- Glencairn Museum
- High School Park
- Meadowbrook Farm
- Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust

www.visitsecretplaces.org

Secret Places was funded in part by the Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau

FRIENDS OF HIGH SCHOOL PARK

Spring and Summer 2010 Programs and Events Programs

SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2010, 2-4PM

Establishing New Plants Planting, Watering, Pruning & Composting Basics with Diana K. Weiner

If these practices are applied to your new plantings you can be assured that strong root systems will grow and your investment survives and thrives.

Members—FREE, \$5.00 each non-members.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2010, 7-9PM

Plant Enthusiast Program - Trees of Age in Philadelphia with Ken Leroy

Majestic trees are all around us. Walk down Alumni Path and you will behold some beauties! Who better to tell a story of trees that have been growing for hundreds of years on historic sites in and around Philadelphia than Ken, who is certified through the International Society of Arboriculture. Location TBD.

Members—FREE, \$5.00 each non-members. • Reservations Required

SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2010, 8-10AM

Spring Bird Walk with Ruth Pfeffer

Spring is the peak season and morning the peak time to observe song birds as they migrate to their summer destinations. Our park serves as a breeding ground. Enjoy an early morning walk through the park with our local bird expert.

FREE to all

SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2010, 10AM—5PM

Arts in the Park- 15th Anniversary!

50 Juried Artists display their wares, great music, food and lots of family fun all—proceeds benefit The Friends of High School Park.

Suggested Donation—\$3.00 • Rain Date: June 13

SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2010, 2-4PM

Organic Lawn Care & the Alternative – Groundcovers - the Outdoor "Flooring"

with Diana K. Weiner

If you still need some green grass, we will show you how to strengthen it. If you are ready for a no mow, green and walk-able surface, we'll show you grass lawn alternatives for both sun or shade.

Members—FREE, \$5.00 each non-members

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2010, 2-4PM

Dog Day Sunday with Louis Mande

Bring your dog out to the park and learn some CLICKER tricks to keep "Fido" well-behaved and exercised.

FREE to all

Visit our website at: www.highschoolpark.org

for additional programs, park workdays, plant enthusiast programs and adopt a plot information.

Healthy Parks Increase Home Property Values

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she recently sold a house diagonally opposite High School Park in Elkins Park after a brief time on the market for its asking price. "Any home that sells quickly usually sells for a higher price," she said. "Did the location of that house make a difference? Absolutely!"

The premium that a nearby park lends to residential property is more significant in areas where open space is in scarcer supply, explaining the astronomical value of real estate ringing Central Park in New York. But even in smaller cities and suburbs, studies show that homes located near parks, greenbelts, trails and wetlands are easier to market, sell more quickly, sell at higher rates, pay more in taxes, and appreciate at a greater rate than homes further from open spaces.

"Homes near parks will be lighter and brighter," Sauber said. "Homes with children almost always want to be near a

park." However, she said, it was "almost impossible" to attach statistics to support the observation because many variables besides location influence a property's value.

A 2008 report by the Center for City Park Excellence of the Trust for Public Land estimates that Philadelphia's park system has a combined economic value of \$1.9 billion in services, income and taxes to the city, and suggests there's something to that real estate notion that it's all about location—specifically location near a park.

For example, location rent (the advantage of one parcel of land over another because of its location) due to Pennypack Park in Philadelphia accounts for 33 percent of land value at 40 feet, 9 percent at 1,000 feet, and 4.2 percent at 2,500 feet, a 1974 study found. Although the study is more than 30 years old, the conclusions are still "right about on target," said Dorkey.