



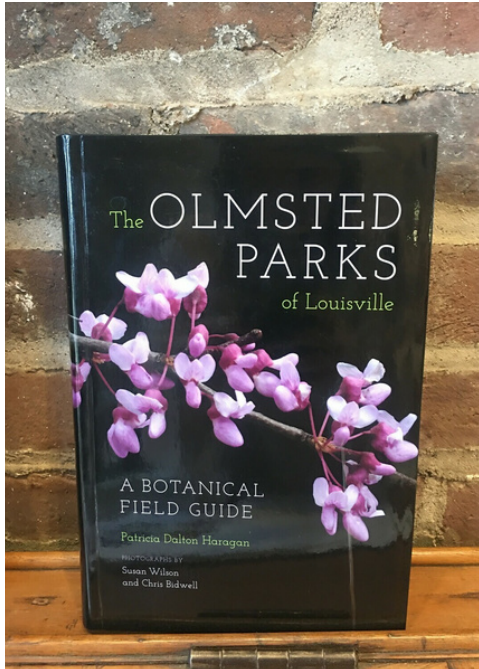
OLMSTED
PARKS
CONSERVANCY

NATURE & NEIGHBORHOOD

Summer 2023



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Cover: Volunteers plant flowers near the recently renovated Hogan's Fountain in Cherokee Park.

Right: A child enjoys a Free Play event in Cherokee Park. Read more about Free Play on page 6.



The Summer Guide to SPRAYGROUNDS

Jesse Hendrix-Inman
Director of Communications

THE BEST PARKS TO VISIT DURING A HOT Louisville summer are the parks with water features! Sprayground designs in the Olmsted Parks range from the older concrete obelisks, which spout a fountain

of water out the top, to modern, ADA accessible spraygrounds with interactive features. As a parent to a 7-year-old, I am happy to share my favorite sprayground picks for the season:

SHAWNEE PARK

This sprayground has a *Belle of Louisville* theme, with the water features forming a paddlewheel boat. It is mostly open space, so children can run freely. It is located next to an ADA accessible playground and the new Shawnee Nature Play Space, in view of the iconic Shawnee Park Pavilion. We have spent hours at this play area without realizing the time!



TYLER PARK

There seems to be a theme here: When a sprayground is coupled with a Nature Play Space, children can stay and play all day. The sensory experience of moving from logs, stones and other natural materials to the splash zone is something that keeps kids engaged for hours.

IROQUOIS PARK

The Iroquois Park sprayground mimics the natural features of the park, with stones and a winding path through the spray features. The sprayground integrates seamlessly into the playground and is located in a beautiful woodland setting.



These are my top picks, but there is much to love about all the spraygrounds. Algonquin, Baxter Square, Shelby and Victory Parks have modern spraygrounds as well. Seek out the double obelisk sprayground in

Cherokee Park across from Hogan's Fountain and you'll usually find a quiet, secluded experience...and maybe even a few deer!

Stay cool this summer!

Visit the NEW [olmstedparks.org](https://www.olmstedparks.org) website to view all your sprayground options.

Save the Date
for



9.14.2023

Join us at the
Beer Garden
that afternoon
in Seneca Park
5-8 pm





Children enjoy the new nature play area in Shawnee Park.

A DIFFERENT WAY TO PLAY

Bringing nature play to Louisville's Olmsted Parks

Matt Spalding
Director of Stewardship

VISITORS TO SHAWNEE PARK'S playground can now enjoy a new amenity – a nature play space! Where there was once simply turf grass, there is now an amazing array of wooden play features. But what is nature play, and why is it important here in Louisville?

WHAT IS NATURE PLAY?

Play is a key part of development for many species. Just as wolf pups wrestle, baby squirrels chase, and bear cubs mimic their elders, human children



play to learn about the world around them. Through play, children build communication skills, cooperation, negotiation, problem solving, balance, risk taking, creativity and much more. The benefits increase when children are free from outside distractions, with no parents or authorities dictating what to do. But in the last few decades, the amount of outdoor time and self-directed play has decreased dramatically for most children in the United States.

Unlike in organized sports, where a coach tells everyone how to practice and compete, free play allows children to make their own rules, decide how to spend their time, and choose where to focus their attention. Nature play takes this concept and incorporates natural materials. While traditional playgrounds made of metal and plastic tend to limit methods of play (e.g., go up the ladder and down the slide), natural features offering multiple possibilities give children the flexibility to choose their own adventure. Additionally, playing with materials like tree bark, limestone blocks, and mulch helps kids connect with the natural world, establishing a love of nature that will stay with them for a lifetime.

NATURE PLAY IN THE OLMSTED PARKS

Several years ago, inspired by the Children at Play Network at Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, Olmsted Parks Conservancy began to schedule pop-up Free Play days in parks. These family-friendly events provided loose parts for children to interact with such as hay bales, canvas tarps, lumber, chalk, tree rounds, and large cardboard boxes. Trained Play Facilitators would supervise the sites, keeping a lookout for hazards and occasionally redirecting unsafe activities, but mostly discouraging parents from interrupting the kids' play flow. The Free Play events

usually took place next to traditional playgrounds, and it was fun to watch the children utilize both the familiar and the novel as they built forts, designed obstacle courses, and invented games.

When the pandemic struck and in-person gatherings became unsafe, the Conservancy shifted from hosting Free Play days to constructing permanent nature play spaces in the parks. The first, in Tyler Park, included a series of balance beams, log walks, and climbing features to complement the new playground. It was a smash hit right away. Later we added nature play components to a play site at Baringer Hill in Cherokee Park, including log rounds and a sandbox.

Then, in 2022, we received a grant from the Norton Family Foundation, which enabled us to build the nature play space in Shawnee Park.



Building cardboard forts is a favorite activity at Free Play events in the parks.



Left, top: A preliminary model of the nature play area. Below: Lauren Hendrickson attaches footholds to a climbing wall.



contribute to the development of the space and fosters a sense of ownership over the finished product.

Once the Conservancy's Team for Healthy Parks began to accumulate materials – mostly large tree trunks blown down in heavy spring wind storms – we began brainstorming and soon realized this had the potential to be our most ambitious play space yet. Major Waltman, our Project Director, created a 3D model highlighting the basic layout and features: balance beams, log walks, cable challenges, climbing structures and a “tot lot” for smaller kids. In April, construction began.

The Shawnee Park nature play space was built entirely by the Team for Healthy Parks and other Conservancy staff. The process took six weeks, some specialized equipment (including an Alaskan chainsaw mill), and lots of creativity. A concrete pipe became a sandbox, debarked locust poles became vertical climbing structures, and oak slabs became a climbing wall complete with colorful hand and foot holds. Throughout the process, the Team worked closely with a certified playground inspector from Louisville Parks & Recreation to ensure the play space would be safe for children.

On May 23, the new nature play space officially opened in a ceremony attended by representatives from the Shawnee neighborhood, Play Cousins

BUILDING THE SHAWNEE NATURE PLAY SPACE

The new nature play space would be built beside Shawnee Park’s existing playground, which was already a popular spot with its sprayground, ADA accessible surfaces, parking, and restroom. After choosing a site, the Conservancy invited park users to share what they would like to see in the new space. At Hayride on the Hill in Shawnee Park last October, kids and families offered ideas through surveys; drawings on maps; and 3D modelling with pipe cleaners, cardboard tubes, tissue paper, and other materials. Participatory design offers park users and especially play experts (neighborhood kids!) to

Collective, the Norton Family Foundation, Olmsted Parks Conservancy, and Louisville Parks & Rec – plus a lot of kids!

LOOKING AHEAD

In the future, Olmsted Parks Conservancy will bring nature play to even more parks across Louisville. Currently, plans are in development for nature play spaces in Central Park and Chickasaw Park. Each site is different and will be customized based on topography, needs and community input, but the purpose is always the same: to give kids a space to be kids. By providing nature play spaces in our parks, we hope to enhance family experiences and help kids create memories that can last a lifetime.



Left, inset: A concrete tube was converted into this sandbox in the new nature play area in Shawnee Park. Below: Kids play on the completed oak slab climbing wall.



Meet the Team



Janelle Wilhelm Membership Coordinator

On Staff Since: February 2021

Favorite Olmsted Park: Iroquois

Hobbies: Baking, crocheting, reading, and ballet

Growing up in a small town and being heavily involved in Girl Scouts gave Janelle a deep appreciation for nature, which stayed with her when she moved to Louisville. As Membership Coordinator, she manages the Conservancy's donor database and oversees member benefits (including the e-magazine!). She is also the primary caregiver of the office cat, Freddie. Janelle loves being part of the Olmsted team because she gets to work with such fun and knowledgeable colleagues. "I'm always learning new things from them," she says, "whether we're talking about plants, animals, or life in general."

Sit a Spell

The magic that benches bring to our Olmsted Parks

Kathy Ezzell
Donor Relations
Manager



A World's Fair bench in Cherokee Park.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY benches in the Olmsted Parks have that distinct, old-timey style? The reason is connected to that most famous Olmsted-designed park, Central Park in New York City.

The iconic World's Fair bench was developed for use at the 1939 World's Fair, which was held in New York during 1938 and 1939. Robert Moses and Kenneth Lynch collaborated on the final design to maximize comfort and take advantage of modern manufacturing processes. 8,000 of these benches were created for the World's Fair, and since then, the design has seen only a few slight changes. You'll be able to spot the

World's Fair bench by its round armrests and touch of Victorian style.

With its timeless design that fits seamlessly into various park landscapes, the World's Fair bench was chosen as the predominant bench in all 17 of Louisville's Olmsted Parks. As a nod to New York City's Central Park, Louisville's Central Park features armless, settee-style benches, painted in the same green finish as the benches in New York.

The World's Fair benches in New York's Central Park are placed mainly in formal settings, with rustic and stone benches in more natural areas. Here in Louisville, Olmsted Parks Conservancy adopted the same



Left: A green, settee-style bench in Louisville's Central Park. Right: A rustic cedar bench in Iroquois Park.

approach in upper Iroquois Park. There you will find rustic cedar benches which blend nicely with the wooded landscape.

"The Central Park settee and rustic benches were original to the Park's inception in the mid-19th century," said a representative of the Central Park Conservancy in New York. "They were designed to support the intended character of the landscape as a rural retreat. The simplistic design of the settee was meant to be as inconspicuous as possible in the landscape, and the rustic benches—artistically crafted from unmilled logs and branches—were designed to complement the character of the Park's more picturesque landscapes."¹

There are approximately 300 benches in Louisville's Olmsted Parks, more than half of which have been purchased or "adopted" by park users. These benches are marked with custom forged bronze plaques.

¹ Jen Carlson, "Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About NYC's Iconic Park Benches," 2016.

Most plaques are in memory of loved ones or cherished pets, but some commemorate living park enthusiasts.

One park user, Martha Simione, decided to honor a close friend with a memorial bench in Cherokee Park. She chose a location in lower Baringer Hill (often called "Dog Hill") facing an area which Conservancy staff refer to as the "Doughnut Meadow." When Martha learned what the place was called, she was delighted: her friend's nickname was Doughnut Glaze. It was meant to be!



Kathy's favorite bench plaque features a quote from A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh. Do you know where she is?

For information about sponsoring your own World's Fair bench, contact Kathy at kathy.ezell@olmstedparks.org or call (502) 456-8125.

Fun and FREE

Summer Family Activities

With a new school year just around the corner, we're all eager to make the most of what's left of the summer. But family fun doesn't have to break the bank. Here are just a few ways to enjoy summer in the Olmsted Parks—without spending a dime!

1

SEE A MOVIE.

Enjoy free movie nights at Iroquois Park throughout the months of August and September. For a detailed schedule, check out iroquoisamphitheater.com.

2

TAKE IN A SHOW.

The Kentucky Shakespeare Festival continues in Central Park through early August, with our Ballet Bound partner, the Louisville Ballet, performing in *Shakespeare in Dance: Lady M*. For details, visit kyshakespeare.com.

3

VISIT A SPRAYGROUND OR NATURE PLAY AREA.

Better yet, visit both! Tyler Park and Shawnee Park combine spraygrounds with nature play areas so kids can play for hours.

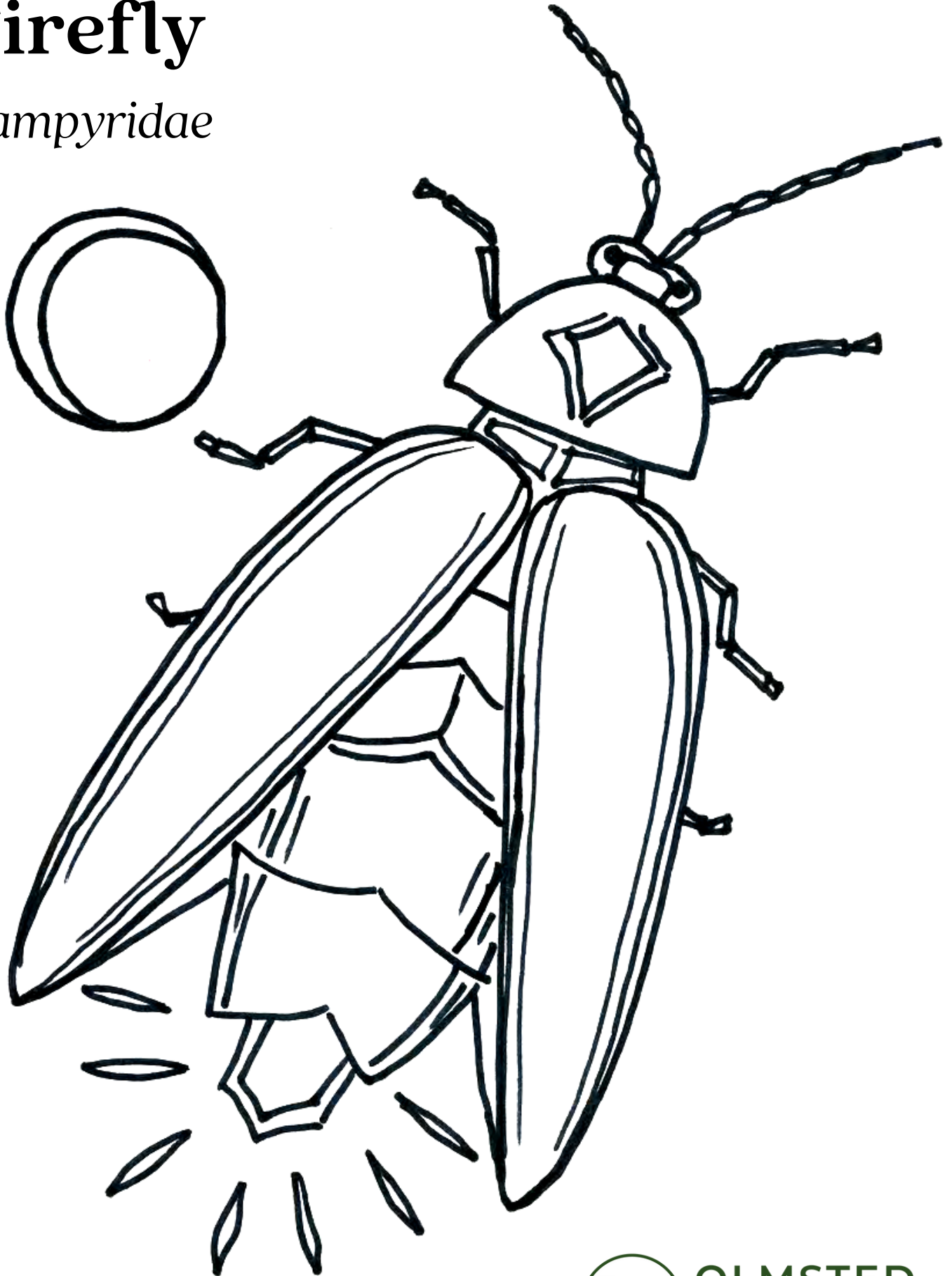
4

GO ON A NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT.

Explore the parks and learn about the plants and animals who live there. You can find lists of things to look for on our website: olmstedparks.org.

Firefly

Lampyridae



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OLMSTED PARKS CONSERVANCY

Olmsted Parks Conservancy's mission is to restore, enhance and forever protect Louisville's Olmsted-designed parks and parkways, connecting nature and neighborhood while strengthening the community's well-being.

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