

November 21, 2023

Stephanie Walton
Chief of Marketing & Communications
330-865-8040 x215
swalton@summitmetroparks.org

Claire Merrick
Marketing & Public Relations Manager
330-865-8040 x229
cmerrick@summitmetroparks.org

SUMMIT METRO PARKS HONORED WITH STATEWIDE AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Summit Metro Parks has received three Awards of Excellence from the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA). OPRA's annual Awards of Excellence recognize organizations throughout Ohio that embody the vision, dedication and demonstration of excellence in parks and recreation. These awards highlight the efforts of those organizations that transcend everyday standards to make a difference and improve the quality of life in Ohio communities.

The park district has received the following awards:

First Place: Summit Lake Community Garden: Fresh Food, Learning and Empowerment

The Summit Lake neighborhood of Akron is a "food desert," a geographic area where access to fresh food is severely limited by a lack of full-service groceries stores and other markets. The lack of appropriate food retailers usually aligns with disinvestment in other critical services in lower income areas. Summit Metro Parks (SMP) works with local partner organizations such as Let's Grow Akron (LGA) to provide a comprehensive investment in healthy food opportunities in Summit Lake.

Second Place: Restoring & Protecting Sand Run

Opened to the public in 1929, Sand Run Metro Park is the oldest and busiest park in the Summit Metro Parks system. Spanning nearly 1,000 acres, the park receives about 2 million visits annually. Prior to its restoration, Sand Run Metro Park and its namesake stream were facing significant challenges from stormwater runoff and infrastructure that made it extremely difficult for fish to travel freely throughout the waterway. To address these challenges, SMP launched a multi-year effort to implement ecological and infrastructure improvements and ultimately closed a section of the park to vehicle traffic permanently to further protect the environment.

Third Place: Cycling Without Age

Cycling Without Age (CWOA) is about many things, but it really comes down to the joy of feeling the breeze on your face, no matter your age, ability or circumstance. Together with The Andrea Rose Teodosio Memorial Foundation, Summit Metro Parks was the first park district (and only the second organization) in Ohio to establish the program to offer seniors and people living with disabilities a new way to enjoy the outdoors. This free program features adaptive bike rides that give a joyful “wind in your hair” experience. Volunteer-piloted, electric-assist trishaws pedal through the parks with a “pilot” in the back and a bench seat (with a panoramic view!) in the front.

“Parks and recreation professionals throughout Ohio work every day to improve the quality of life of the people they serve,” said OPRA Executive Director Woody Woodward. “This effort is a shining example of that kind of work, and we are pleased to be able to present this award.”

Summit Metro Parks staff will accept the awards on February 6, 2024 at OPRA’s Awards Celebration as part of the 2024 OPRA Conference & Trade Show in Sandusky. OPRA is a non-profit, public interest organization representing more than 2,000 professionals and citizen board members striving to provide quality park and recreational facilities and opportunities for all Ohioans while protecting and preserving Ohio’s natural resources. For more information, visit <https://opraonline.org/opra-awards-of-excellence-winners/>.

* * * * *

In 2023, Summit Metro Parks is celebrating the benefits of native plants through Wild Back Yards. The park district manages more than 15,000 acres throughout 16 parks, three nature centers and over 150 miles of trails, including 22 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail. Annual attendance is approximately 5.5 million visits. Find us online at summitmetroparks.org.



#summitmetroparks