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SUMMIT METRO PARKS CELEBRATES “BERT SZABO DAY” IN HONOR OF PARK DISTRICT’S FIRST NATURALIST

Summit Metro Parks today announced it will formally name December 4 “Bert Szabo Day” in honor of the park district’s first interpretive naturalist. To help mark this special occasion, Sand Run Parkway will be temporarily renamed “Bert Szabo Parkway” for the month of December. A 34-year park district employee who has also served as a longstanding volunteer, Szabo will celebrate his 99th birthday on December 4, 2019.

“Bert is in a league of his own when it comes to his contributions to Summit Metro Parks, both as an employee and as a volunteer,” said Executive Director Lisa King. “The park district recognizes daily the enormous benefit of his influence, and Bert Szabo Day is a way to publicly honor his dedication to the parks and nature education.”

After spending several years managing the dairy farm at Western Reserve Academy, Szabo began his career with what was then known as the Akron Metropolitan Park District in 1957. He worked in Sand Run Metro Park and served as the area manager for Goodyear Heights Metro Park before being appointed as the first chief naturalist in 1963. Among his many accomplishments at the park district, Szabo helped initiate the Fall Hiking Spree, designed exhibits at the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center, created the unique portal sign at Deep Lock Quarry Metro Park and was an early contributor to Green Islands newsletter, now a magazine with a circulation of more than 14,000. Following his retirement in 1991, Szabo has become one of the park district’s most committed volunteers, contributing more than 7,000 service hours to date.

His many awards and distinctions include induction into the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Hall of Fame, Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame and Summit Metro Parks Volunteer Hall of Fame. He has received the National Audubon Society Great Egret Award, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Conservation Achievement Award, the National Association of Interpretation (NAI) President's Award and was twice named NAI's Outstanding Senior/Retired Interpreter. Szabo has also been recognized several times over the course of his outstanding volunteer service with Summit Metro Parks, especially for his assistance in documenting the park district's early history.

Szabo has served in leadership roles in many nature-based organizations, including NAI, the Association for Interpretive Naturalists, Greater Akron Audubon Society, Friends of Metro Parks and the Kirtlandia Society of Cleveland Natural History Museum. He was appointed multiple times to the Governor's Natural Areas Council.

Szabo earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and a Master of Science in Botany from Ohio University and served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1946. He lives in Munroe Falls.

Editor's note: Photos available upon request.

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Summit Metro Parks manages more than 14,000 acres, including 16 parks, several conservation areas and more than 150 miles of trails, with 22 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

Annual attendance averages 5 million visits. Visit us online at summitmetroparks.org.



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