

# GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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## BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

S. Theresa Carter Chair

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Herb Newman

Jill M. Stritch

Rev. Dr. Curtis T. Walker Sr.

The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

Lisa M. King Executive Director

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## ENJOY MUSIC BY THE LAKE

Treat yourself to live musical performances surrounded by the beauty of nature at Music by the Lake. This family-friendly concert series by the Metro Parks Ensemble allows visitors of all ages to experience summer evenings outdoors while enjoying music from the big band era, Broadway musicals, children's films, TV themes and more.

## DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH SUSTAINABLE CHOICES

By Carol Vigorito, Interpretive Naturalist

Sustainability means making choices that conserve Earth's resources for future generations.

The park district's mission statement highlights sustainable management of natural resources, embracing practices that protect native biodiversity and provide healthy ecosystems for visitors to explore and enjoy.

A visit to Liberty Park reveals examples of sustainable solutions. Rain gardens and bioswales (depressions with native vegetation) manage and filter storm water. A geothermal system using Earth's constant underground temperature reduces our carbon footprint for heating and cooling. Bins in the parking lot provide community access to composting and electronics recycling.

Small personal choices make a big difference, too!

- Save money and conserve energy by unplugging electronic devices when not in use.

- Choose healthy reusable items like stainless steel straws, cloth napkins and glass storage containers.
- Select refurbished electronics when possible and properly recycle unusable electronic items.

Learn more by visiting our nature and visitors centers or through naturalist-led sustainable living programs!

[ At Summit Metro Parks, we conserve, sustainably manage and value natural resources for the health and enjoyment of our community, and inspire people to connect with nature through clean and safe parks. ]

## BRIDGING THE GAP

By Mark Szeremet, Chief of Planning & Development

### FREEDOM TRAIL MIDDLEBURY CONNETION

What is now Freedom Trail was once an abandoned rail corridor owned by METRO Regional Transit Authority that has turned into a beautiful multipurpose trail for the public to enjoy. Also known as the Freedom Secondary Line once owned by Conrail, the entire corridor spans from Akron near E.J. Thomas Hall at The University of Akron and travels northeast through Akron, Tallmadge, near Munroe Falls Metro Park and ends at Middlebury Road in Kent.

The Portage Hike & Bike Trail, which starts at Middlebury Road, is a multi-jurisdictional trail project that travels east, with portions of the trail managed by Portage Park District, the City of Kent, City of Ravenna and Kent State University.

The problem was the short 0.3-mile gap between the two trails, complicated by a winding road and railroad tracks, making it difficult and unsafe for users to travel between

them. This new connection creates a seamless and safe route for continuous travel east or west.

Creating Freedom Trail took a lot of coordination between Summit Metro Parks and local partners including the City of Kent, Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), First Energy, CSX Railroad and Portage County Engineer, as well as private property owners in a small area. Summit Metro Parks is grateful for this cooperation that has allowed us to bring connections to life. We have completed a short multi-purpose connector between the two trails, consisting of a 10-foot-wide asphalt path with switchbacks and a bridge over the railroad corridor built to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The project makes a safe off-road connection between the two existing trails. The project was paid for using the park district's general fund along with several different local, state and federal grants.

Currently, eight miles of Freedom Trail are open to visitors from Middlebury Road to Mill Street. Another 1-mile section is currently under construction from Mill Street to Buchtel Avenue in downtown Akron, leaving a small section to complete in the near future to reach the Towpath Trail. Both trails connect schools, businesses and parks with downtowns and neighborhoods from Akron to Kent. The connector trail between the two trails will be a major benefit to the region, making one of the largest east-west trails in Northeast Ohio! Come on out and hike or ride a little (or a lot) of the trail.

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## SMP HISTORY IS AKRON'S HISTORY

One hundred years ago during Akron's centennial celebration, the young Akron Metropolitan Park District, then just four years old, received its first land donation from local farmer Joseph Courtney. The parcel of land,

located at what is now the corner of North Portage Path and Merriman Road, was marked with a boulder that can still be visited today.

In the one hundred years that followed, the park district, now known as Summit Metro Parks, became intertwined with the city of Akron, opening several parks that highlight the hills, valleys, waterways and forests in and around the city. Summit Metro Parks is proud to join Akron in celebration of its bicentennial and wishes the community enduring connections with nature for generations to come.

## OUR SHARED HISTORY

1921: Park district founded

Under the leadership of Goodyear Tire & Rubber founder F.A. Seiberling, the Akron Metropolitan Park District was established.

1929: Sand Run Metro Park established

Comprised of 700 acres when it first opened, Sand Run Metro Park is the oldest and most visited park in the park district.

1930: Goodyear Heights Metro Park and Gorge Metro Park established

Swiftly growing, the park district opened three new parks this year, including these two with land in Akron.

1941: Firestone Metro Park established

With several Metro Parks open in central and northern Summit County, Firestone Metro Park realized the park district's goal of opening a park in the growing area of south Akron.

1966: F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm and Hampton Hills Metro Park established

Another busy year, the park district opened three more parks, including these two with land in Akron. F.A.

Seiberling Nature Realm also included the opening of the park district's first nature center.

#### 1981: Cascade Valley Metro Park Established

This park is home to several Akron icons, including the Signal Tree and a scenic overlook high above the Cuyahoga River.

#### 2013: Freedom Trail Established

Named for the Freedom Secondary Rail line of the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad, this multipurpose trail bridges the east-west gap between Portage County and downtown Akron.

#### 2021: Summit Lake Nature Center opens

Located south of downtown Akron, this nature center opened during the park district's own centennial celebration, once again tying Akron's history to Summit Metro Parks.

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#### TOUCH-A-TRUCK

At Munroe Falls Metro Park / Lake Area

Presented by: Wayside Furniture

Saturday, AUGUST 2, 2025 | 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Sensory and Autism-friendly hour – 10 to 11 a.m.

Touch-a-Truck continues – 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.