

OPINION

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Portage Park District committed steward of valuable local resource

PORTAGE PARK DISTRICT

When I moved from Boulder, Colorado, to Kent many years ago, I wondered if people in Ohio were as enthusiastic about energy efficiency, buying green products and hiking in the green belt as my former cohorts. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that there were many people here who shared my interests, chief among them conserving open spaces and building an appreciation for our natural environment.

I have been excited to see the growth and development of the Portage Park District in the last few years. From a fledgling enterprise created in 1991, the park district now oversees 1,200 acres of park land and 14 miles of hike and bike trails.

Over the past 15 years, the park district, working with a variety of public and private partners, has brought in approximately \$8.8 million worth of grants and donations to acquire new parkland and build new trails. This has leveraged Portage County's investment five times over!

Unlike our neighboring counties who are supported by property tax levies that provide millions of dollars, the Portage Park District operates on a very modest budget for operations and maintenance, with funding coming from the Portage County general fund, local governments, rents, royalties and donations. With shrinking government funding, donations from those who enjoy kayaking on the Cuyahoga, biking the trails, or hosting a Boy Scout group at Camp Spelman are ever more important.

Portage Parks does all the right things. Its goals are to preserve our natural resources, provide nature education programs for all ages, create parks and trails for healthy recreation at no charge, and partner with local communities and organizations to create and manage parks and programs across the county.

And the benefits are many:

- Protection of drinking water resources as well as wildlife habitat
- Recreation areas for all ages and abilities
- Improved quality of life and preservation of scenic landscapes



Bicycling enthusiasts can enjoy Portage Park District trails.

GREEN PORTAGE

Helen Tremaine Gregory
Portage Park District



■ Economic returns from stimulating related businesses, construction and management jobs.

■ Increased property values

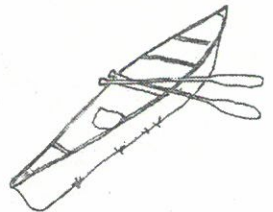
■ Immediate and long-term value of green infrastructure for managing storm water and mitigating pollution

■ Preservation of a natural legacy for our children.

We take so much of this for granted. We expect to have trails to hike with our friends or walk our dogs. We expect to have access to canoeing on the river on a beautiful fall day or cross country skiing in Towner's Woods when the snow begins to fall. Living in a rural county, we expect that our children will explore the parks and learn to identify an oak tree from a maple and a frog from a toad. But, in fact, opportunities to enjoy these park resources are created through hard work by a few dedicated staff and many volunteers who understand how important these benefits are.

I hope, as the year draws to a close, you will become a Friend of the Parks by making a contribution. You can send your gift to the Portage Park District Foundation, (PPDF), 705 Oakwood St., Suite G04, Ravenna, OH 44266, or go to the website at www.portageparkdistrict.org. Your gift is important and will be greatly appreciated!

Helen Tremaine Gregory is a member of the Portage Park District Foundation Board. "Green Portage" is monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.



Canoeing the Cuyahoga River is another leisure activity in the parks.