

GREEN PORTAGE

Portage Parks offer a world of summer fun



**CHRISTINE
CRAYCROFT**

With summer upon us, there are so many wonderful activities going on in the Portage Parks around the county.

The Park District is offering the "Wild Hikes Challenge," a great way to get out with family or friends and see our county's rich natural and cultural heritage. To participate, you must walk, hike, skip, jog, or run on eight of the 10 designated trails before Nov. 1 to earn a hiking staff and "2010 Wild Hikes" tag. You can hike on your

own or join a group on one of our scheduled hikes led by Park District staff and volunteers. For more information and a form go to www.portagepark-district.org or call the office at 330.297.7728

Coming up on Saturday, July 10, is the Headwaters Adventure Race, a combination event to support trails and watershed conservation. The challenge is to run (or walk) two miles on the Headwaters Trail, bike 10 miles on rural roads to the Camp Hi Canoe Livery, and then paddle five miles back to Mantua on the Cuyahoga (Crooked) River. You can go solo or as part of a two person team. The per person entry fee, which includes the canoe or kayak rental, refreshments, and a commemorative gift, is \$40 in advance or \$50 the day of the race.

For those who want to forego the biking and paddling part, there is the Fitness Walk option for \$15. This consists of a two-mile round-trip walk or run from Buchert Park in Mantua on the Headwaters Trail.

Seneca Ponds in Streetsboro, tucked away off Mondial Drive, has 48 acres of woodlands, wildlife, and wetlands to explore. You can look for the swan signets recently born or try your hand at fishing for small mouth bass in one of the ponds.

You can take a hike in Dix Park or Towner's

Woods, try rollerblading on the "Portage" (the Hike and Bike Trail), or rent a canoe at Camp Hi in Hiram or Crooked River Adventures in Kent.

We hear the news stories regularly and can't help but get alarmed. Obesity and related health problems are at epidemic proportions. More and more children are being prescribed psychiatric medicines for depression and ADHD; children are spending on average over six hours a day with electronic media and half as much time outdoors as children 20 years ago. Though not a cure-all, there is a growing body of research that confirms the physical and mental health benefits from spending time outside and connected with nature.

Nonprofit organizations such as Children and Nature (www.childrenandnature.org), The National Wildlife Federation through their "Be Out There" campaign (www.beoutthere.org), and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources through their "Explore the Outdoors" campaign (www.exploretheoutdoorsohio.com) are working to help make those connections. On their websites you can find the research that describes current problems and the many benefits that come from spending active time in nature.

Along with the benefits to the mind and body, we can't overlook nature's impact on our spirit. Spending any time observing the workings and wonders of nature, and one can't help but feel a sense of awe and reverence for the beauty, complexity and miracle of life on earth, of which we are a part, and upon which we depend.

Contact the Portage Park District (www.portageparkdistrict.org; 330.297.7728) for ideas and links to our partners who offer other local and state parks, preserves, trails and no-cost or low-cost nature programs.

Christine Craycroft is executive director of the Portage Park District. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier.