

The Watering Hole

The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter



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One step forward at a time

In this issue, we're highlighting a few of our many volunteers. From Girl Scouts to grant writers and everyone in between, the Willow Waterhole Greenway came to be because of individuals having a vision and taking action.

Each step may have seemed small at the time, but we wouldn't have the resources and green space today without each one. We're grateful for actions—big and small—that continue to bring the Waterhole to life.

Welcoming our newest Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy members

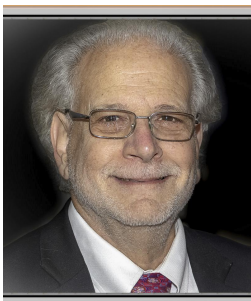
The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy is happy to welcome the following new annual members. Membership donations provide general operations funds that help maintain the park and programming, including free recreational events. When you join us, you become a partner in keeping Willow Waterhole a beautiful urban green space. To learn about the levels of membership, visit www.willowwaterhole.org/membership.

Individual Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Franklin Abbott ● Bruce Biundo ● Troy Lynn Bonds ● Lowell Brown ● Marsha Carlberg ● Amber Farnham-Middleton ● Janice Fastow ● Jacqueline V. Heidorn ● Frank Jones ● Winston Kile ● Joe Lamonte ● Mike Loughlin ● Deborah Taylor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dorothy Beeson-Caswell ● Anne Bornet ● Jane Falk ● Vickie McLemore ● David Osherow ● Mark Picus ● Robert Robleto 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bruce Schroeder

*New members August - October 2020



Board member profile: Howard Sacks



Howard Sacks has been a Maplewood South/North resident for thirty-seven years. He served as the first president of Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy (2001-2011) and is currently the events chairman.

His passion is programming events at the Greenway, particularly live music. He has chaired the last seven Music Festivals and is chairman of Levitt Pavilion Houston, a planned state-of-the-art outdoor music pavilion, which will feature fifty **free** professional concerts annually.

Howard has a B.S. in film and television from Montana State University. He is retired after thirty-six years as a television advertising sales executive for KRIV-FOX26. Howard has been a Cub Scout leader, Little League coach, and served on the boards of Maplewood South/North and the Brays Bayou Association.

Meet the “Mother of Willow Waterhole:” Interview with Karen Cullar

Many often ask us how the Willow Waterhole Greenway came to be—and how it got funded. One of the best people to ask is Karen Cullar, a former grant writer and Houston area resident.

Recently, two board members spoke with Karen about how she discovered the funds needed to establish the Willow Waterhole Greenway. Given her initial involvement, she has affectionately earned the nickname “Mother of Willow Waterhole.”

Here is a bit of that story.

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In the 80’s and 90’s, Houston residents in Meyerland, Westbury, and surrounding areas were starting to think more seriously about flood control.

By 2000, local groups including the Brays Bayou Association had created plans for flood water detention ponds and a natural greenspace. Karen recalled that there was great interest in the project, but no funding at the time.

Karen, then the grant writer for the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD), learned of a new partnership opportunity with the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD). The district was looking for multi-use partners to create recreational features on top of their detention basins.

Art Storey, former director of the Harris County Flood Control District once remarked, “Detention basins don’t have to be ugly.” They can be actively used by communities.



This approach by the Harris Flood Control District created the partnership with the Houston Parks & Rec Department for what is now the Willow Waterhole Greenway.

Through the federal Water Resources Development Act, then-Congressman Ken Bentsen obtained authorization for Project Brays/Willow Waterhole with recreational use. The district and federal partnership created funding for Project Brays.

Meanwhile, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) developed a new funding opportunity for regional grants requiring at least two partners. In February 2000, TPWD invited the Houston Parks & Rec Department to submit a regional grant up to \$100,000, due by April 1, 2000.

Meet the “Mother of Willow Waterhole:” Interview with Karen Cullar (cont.)

Within two months, Karen and a multijurisdictional team submitted a regional grant application to TPWD for \$1 million, using Harris County Flood Control District land acquisition funds to match the proposed park development features as 50/50 matching funds.

The Willow Waterhole partnership included the Houston Parks & Rec Department, Harris County Flood Control District, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Project Brays federal project. Some said it could not be done, especially in such a short timeframe.

The application also included 24 letters of support from the Brays Bayou Association and other community organizations, which Karen received within 24 hours of the request. She noted, “It was an amazingly, overwhelmingly quick response”—a testimony to the vision and support for Willow Waterhole Greenway.

Karen recalled that submitting the application didn’t go exactly as planned, working right up until the deadline. She added, “I try to never write a grant without partners.” With the copier malfunctioning and the mailing deadline passed, she and her colleague Merrie Talley (from the Harris Co. Flood Control District) hand delivered the grant to the department chief and then took him out to lunch.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received seven total grant applications, each valued at \$1 million—demonstrating a need for this type of funding throughout the state.

Ultimately, TPWD selected four projects, including the Brays/Willow Waterhole plan. The Houston Parks & Rec Department received a \$750,000 grant, which brought the Willow Waterhole Greenway to life.

Karen and many others worked with fellow conservation partners to create the greenspace. Partners included the Bayou Preservation Association, The Park People, Audubon Society, Trees for Houston, and the Westbury Area Improvement Corporation.

Karen has since moved to Coldspring, Tex., but continues to advocate for parks and recreation spaces, having worked more than 30 years in the field.

She shared that one of her mentors was Terry Hershey, a former member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and a founding board member of Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association. Terry mentored women such as Karen through her “Women in Government” group, oriented towards supporting parks and nature.

A job well done for Karen and Terry for mothering and loving our green spaces.



Watching out for our feather friends: Loyal bird watchers keep the count going

Many things have changed this year, but one has remained constant, bird watchers love Willow Waterhole. Prior to the pandemic, a group of 20 to 40 birders gathered at the Greenway each month to keep an ongoing bird count. While the number of volunteers has lessened, there are still a few loyal bird watchers making an individual effort.

Those keeping watch over the flocks include local residents Mary Ann Beauchemin, Mark Meyer, and Michael Honel. The group shared a few tips for novice bird enthusiasts:

Get ready to walk:

Bird watching is a great healthy activity and although there are no scheduled monthly walks, everyone is invited to take a walk.

Go early—or late:

Early morning and evening are the best times for observation. In the evening, birds are busy eating to take on a few extra calories for the long night ahead.

Get to know the species:

The recent monthly bird count was 41 different species. A quick search of common species will help you recognize birds along your walk.

Many of the migrating songbirds have headed south for the season; however, the winter birds that nest in the northern states are now arriving to enjoy Houston's mild winters. These include many great duck species as well as bald eagles and osprey.

The birds move around the Greenway and can be spotted at all six lakes. So, head out soon, take your camera and binoculars, and appreciate the natural beauty of Willow Waterhole and its feathered friends.



FREQUENTLY SPOTTED:

- Black-bellied Whistling Duck
- Rock Pigeon
- Great Egrets
- Western Sandpiper
- Blue Jay
- Northern Mockingbird
- Great-tailed Grackle
- European Starling
- Neotropic Cormorant

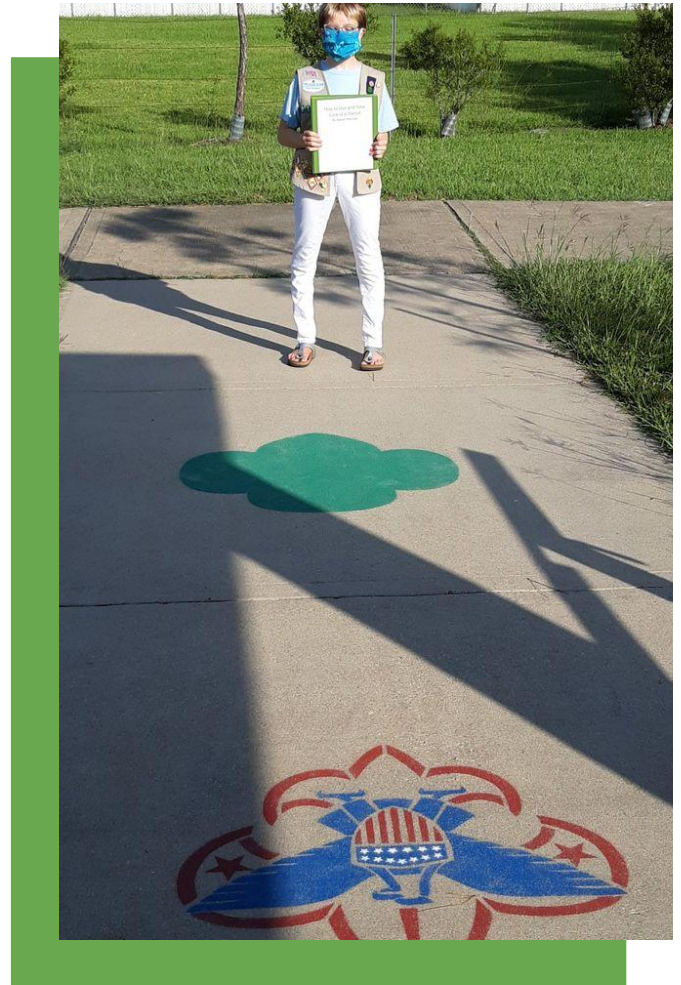
Getting creative with sidewalk art

We are always looking for new ways to add color and life to Willow Waterhole.

Girl Scout Alexis Norman recently painted scout logos in front of the Dabney Kennedy Scout Pavilion as part of her Silver Award project. To inspire others, she created an [instructional video](#) and book for the Conservancy on stencil art.

She detailed the process of designing and purchasing a stencil, cleaning the surface, selecting paint, and painting the sidewalk.

The Conservancy is currently seeking future sidewalk art projects, and this video will enable others to follow in Alexis' footsteps. Our next project would be adding bird art to the sidewalk near the Rafferty Memorial Oak. If you are interested in this project, please email info@willowwaterhole.org.



More conservation updates

- Agreement with AT&T signed to allow tree planting on its property to cover up fence, equipment, and trailers
- Commitment from the Harris County Flood Control District to plant 47 trees this winter at Willow Lake
- Request sent to City of Houston to plant single row of trees along Southern Crushed Concrete fence line
- Tree planting (50 trees) on Jan. 30, 2021 with Livelihood.eco

A big thank you to Kate Brusegaard, a retired AT&T employee and Maplewood resident, who helped orchestrate the AT&T tree planting agreement!



Creature Corner: Unwelcome guests

You might not have seen them, but we have unwelcome guests at the Greenway called nutria, alias swamp rats!



These stocky brown rodents were introduced into the U.S. in the late 1900's from South America for their fur. Active primarily at night, nutria destroy wetlands and crops. Their burrows cause soil erosion and can damage human-engineered flood control systems.

Exclusively vegetarians, they prefer the soft, succulent parts of the base of plants such as grasses and reeds. The plants that they eat hold together wetland soils.

Although the young might look cute, the adults not so much. Their large orange teeth are quite distinctive. Adults can get as large as 24 inches in length and average 18 pounds. Females may have two to three litters annually and can produce up to 12 per pregnancy.

It is easy to understand how the population can explode!

So how do we remove them from Willow Waterhole? At this point trapping is the only option. Nutria are one of the most invasive animal species in the U.S.

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The Harris County Flood Control District is pursuing the best methods of removing the nutria. If you encounter one, please don't feed them and leave their removal to the Flood Control District.

Beware the Asps

When at Willow Waterhole, be aware of asps—soft, cuddly-looking insects also known as southern flannel moths. The insect gets its name from a flannel-like covering, which hides venomous spines under the hairs.

Adults appear in late spring or early summer and lay their eggs on trees such as oaks, pecans, elms, and hackberry, all common to Houston. The eggs hatch in late summer and spend the winter in cocoons.

When the spines are pressed or rubbed against the skin, they stick into the skin and can cause a burning sensation or rash.

If you have been stung by one of these asps, what next? Try to remove the spines using scotch tape or an ice pack. Pain from the venom usually will subside within an hour and spots will disappear in a day or two.

Pesticides are available. However, the best tool to prevent the sting is education.

Know what they look like and stay away—sound advice when out in nature.



Conservancy Project Updates

Grooving to the music: An Update on Levitt Houston Pavilion

As many have heard, there are plans to build a professional outdoor music pavilion at the Willow Waterhole Greenway with **free** live music.

The Conservancy connected with the Los Angeles-based nonprofit, The Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation, to secure major funding for the initiative.

The Conservancy's project aligned well with the Levitt Foundation's mission of "strengthening the social fabric of America." Levitt empowers communities to "transform underused outdoor spaces into welcoming destinations where the power of free, live music brings people together and invigorates community life." These projects also act as a catalyst for economic revitalization.

Through its annual MusicFest, the Conservancy has seen firsthand how free live music in underserved areas energizes the local community and brings neighbors from near and far.

After submitting a proposal, the Levitt Foundation formally selected and announced the Willow Waterhole Greenway as the site of the ninth Levitt Pavilion in the U.S. However, construction of a possible toll road through the site stalled the project.



In 2018, exciting news surfaced about the Gasmer Shell Research Center—the property was for sale.

This site, adjacent to Dryad (the park's main entrance) features expansive space for an inviting open lawn setting, ample parking, sufficient electricity and water, as well as accessible restrooms.

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Conservancy Project Updates

Through the tenacious efforts of community leaders and outstanding support from Mayor Turner and District K Council Member Martha Castex-Tatum, the City of Houston purchased the property in October 2019.

Levitt Pavilion Houston has requested nineteen acres of the site: three acres for the pavilion, twelve acres for parking, and four acres to repurpose an existing building as a community center. See below for a rendering of the space.

With this vision, Levitt Pavilion Houston has launched a “Founders Circle” fundraising campaign to develop plans for the new site. Please consider joining “Founders Circle” at LevittHouston.org or for more information: info@LevittHouston.org or (281) 687-1334.

Once plans and costs are defined, we will seek input from community stakeholders.

FUTURE SITE OF LEVITT PAVILION HOUSTON



Snapshots: A perfect backdrop

We are pleased to see so many budding and professional photographers capturing the natural beauty of Willow Waterhole. This happy snapshot comes from photographer [Kim Losee](#). She's enjoyed using the Greenway as a backdrop for portraits of families, friends, and her smiling pup, Curren, featured here.



A final word: Send us your photos!



We'd love to feature your photos in The Watering Hole newsletter. Clear, simple snapshots of landscapes, wildlife, and the lakes are ideal. Email photos to volunteer@willowwaterhole.org or tag us on Facebook.

Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy

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