

# The Watering Hole

*The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter*



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## Soaring to new heights

We are excited to announce that the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy has received a multi-million dollar donation from the Kinder Foundation to further its conservation work and place in the Houston community.

You'll read more in this month's newsletter about future plans as well as the ongoing activity from rocket launching to bird watching and tree planting that truly brings the Waterhole to life. Thank you to our volunteers and all those who frequent this beautiful, urban green space.

# Kinder Foundation announces multi-million dollar gift to Willow Waterhole Greenway

The Willow Water Greenspace Conservancy celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2021. It was a year filled with growth and greater recognition in the Houston community.

## Kinder Foundation Donation

In November 2021, the Conservancy received a \$2 million gift from the Kinder with a promise to match an additional \$2 million in donations by others. Kinder Foundation's Guy Hagstette and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner made the announcement at this year's MusicFest in October 30, 2021.

The grant will fund trails at four lakes (Dog, Willow, Triangle, and Scout), a neighborhood trail connection (connecting the surrounding neighborhood to the lakes), and land acquisition.

Nancy Kinder, president of Kinder Foundation, shared, "Willow Waterhole is truly a diamond in the rough that is poised to transform the quality of life of Houstonians in the southwest area of the city. We admire the grit and determination of the conservancy's leaders and volunteers for what they already have accomplished. It is time for Willow Waterhole Greenway to assume its rightful place as one of Houston's great green spaces."

Currently, the Conservancy is looking to raise \$100,000 from the community to be matched by the Kinder grant in the next six months to fund design and real estate services.

**Guy Hagstette, Kinder Foundation,  
SVP, Parks and Civic Projects**



**Mayor Sylvester Turner**

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# Kinder Foundation announces multi-million dollar gift to Willow Waterhole Greenway (continued)

The Conservancy aims to raise a total of \$10 million for upgrades, which would include additional trails, more parking, a pier, an outdoor classroom, and improvements to a native prairie preserve area.

## Greenway Improvements and Events

Notable improvements to the Greenway during 2021 included:

- Paving the Dryad Drive entry and parking lot
- Creating the Naturescape Sculpture Garden
- Planting 200 new trees
- Removing over one ton of litter
- Supporting nine Eagle and Gold/Silver scout projects
- Adding security cameras and signage

Last year, Willow Waterhole hosted five major high school cross country meets and saw the return of our hugely successful Willow Waterhole MusicFest.

The next MusicFest is already scheduled for April 9, 2022.

With your help, the 291-acre Willow Waterhole Greenway can become a signature park in Southwest Houston, much like Memorial and Hermann Park are to their neighborhoods.

## How to Support

To help go to [willowwaterhole.org/support](http://willowwaterhole.org/support). In the donate section, select Capital Projects from the drop-down box in order to qualify for the match.

If you prefer to mail a check, send to:

Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy  
11415 Chimney Rock  
Suite 201  
Houston, TX 77035-2903

Indicate Kinder Capital Projects in the reference line. Thanks for your support!

As always, please come visit this wonderful neighborhood asset.

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## Board member profile: Bill King

Bill King is a board member and serves as water conservation chair of the Conservancy. He fosters usage of the Waterhole by promoting fishing and non-motorized boating at all of the six lakes.

He has worked with the fish hatchery of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's stocking program and most recently worked to have Willow Waterhole added to TPWD's Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail-Buffalo Bayou Loop map.

He particularly enjoys working with volunteers on tree planting and maintenance projects at the Waterhole.

He has worked with several Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops on completion of Eagle and Gold projects. Bill retired from the surety industry in 2019 and has been active at the Waterhole ever since.

He is involved with the Knights of Columbus and Corpus Christi Catholic Church. He was a founding member of the Corpus Christi Catholic School's PTO and has served on various steering committees and was co-chair of the stewardship committee.

Bill is most proud of leading the annual Knights of Columbus Lenten fish fry for thirteen years where he was known as "Kingfish."



He and his wife, Shawn, have two daughters and five grandchildren. They enjoy family vacations and spending time at their farm in Lavaca County. Bill's goal for 2022 is to raise funds to complete the pier and boat launch on Westbury Lake.

The amenity is a \$200,000 investment and, with the recently announced Kinder Foundation's matching funds grant, he hopes that the community can raise the necessary \$100,000 to begin construction on this long-planned improvement.

For further information, please visit [www.willowwaterhole.org/support](http://www.willowwaterhole.org/support).

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# Levitt Pavilion starts master planning for newly named “Gasmer Redevelopment Site”

Brays Oaks Management District (BOMD), with [Lionheart Places](#) and [Natalye Appel + Associates Architects](#), is leading the master planning for the 29- acre “Gasmer Redevelopment Site,” formerly the Shell Technical Center at 5521 Gasmer Road.

Lionheart held a kickoff meeting in December with a steering team assembled by BOMD. Additional steering team meetings and two public open houses are scheduled for first half of 2022. The District has already completed a survey of the site.

“We see this being repurposed as a lifestyle center,” said Ben Brewer, retiring Executive Director of the District. “The four key components of this plan will be to honor the past history of the site; to serve as a detention area for flood waters; to place the Levitt Pavilion Houston, an outdoor music pavilion, in this location; and to reuse and repurpose the rest of the area.”



Eventually, the fences separating Willow Waterhole Greenway and the Gasmer Redevelopment Project will be removed, resulting in one contiguous green space.

“We plan to open in 2024 on two to three acres and share parking, restrooms, and other amenities with the redeveloped Gasmer site,” said Howard Sacks, Levitt Pavilion Houston Board Chair.

As planning continues, finding funding sources is paramount. The recently announced Kinder Foundation gift to Willow Waterhole Greenway of up to \$4 million is transformative for its financial impact and serves as a catalyst for other donors to consider the full vision:

- Willow Waterhole Greenway
- Levitt Pavilion Houston
- Gasmer Redevelopment Project (formerly known as the Shell property)

[See next page for an aerial view.](#)

**Gasmer Site**





# Levitt Pavilion starts master planning for newly named “Gasmer Redevelopment Site” (continued)

**Aerial view of Gasmer Redevelopment Site  
(former Shell property)**



## What is Levitt Pavilion Houston?

Levitt Pavilion Houston is a future outdoor pavilion at Willow Waterhole Greenway managed and programmed by the Friends of Levitt Houston nonprofit partner. The nonprofit will produce a series of free professional concerts for the community each year.

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## Getting to know the plants of Willow Waterhole: Texas holly bushes

When walking at Willow Waterhole, you have likely noticed the beautiful yaupon known as Texas holly.

The yaupon holly is an evergreen shrub or tree that is loved for the colorful berries produced by the female plants. Yaupon is dioecious, which means that male and female flowers are born on separate plants. Male yaupon hollies do not produce berries.

The berries can be red, orange, or even yellow, and birds and other wildlife will feed on them through the winter months.

Both male and female plants produce small white flowers in spring that attract pollinators. Their small leaves are oval, serrated, and dark green. Yaupon hollies' dense, shrubby evergreen growth make them ideal for providing habitat for songbirds and other wildlife.<sup>i</sup>

This plant ensures a steady stream of cardinals, finches, jays, and many other birds that come to feast on yaupon holly's red berries. But don't eat the berries as they make humans throw up!

Yaupon holly leaves are the only naturally occurring source of caffeine that grows in Texas. The leaves are also full of antioxidants and the other compounds that make traditional green tea beneficial for you. On top of all that, tea made from the leaves has a slight, natural sweetness to it making it not just good for you but also wonderful tasting.<sup>ii</sup>

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i. ["Gardening Solutions."](#) University of Florida, 2020

ii. ["Yaupon Holly."](#) ForagingTexas.com, 2008



**Texas Holly (Yaupon)**



## Up, up, and away (and hopefully not into the lake): Rocket launching day

Who doesn't love shooting off rockets?

Well, we can thank Marcus Jackson for helping our Scouts enjoy this annual event at Willow Waterhole. New Cub Scouts, which are co-ed nowadays, are all given a rocket to launch.

The Apollo District, which extends from the University of Houston to Westbury, supplies the rockets and engines. There are three types of engines and depending on the type.

The rockets can soar into the sky from 500 to 1500 feet!

On a beautiful day like they had this year, those rockets were an amazing sight to see. The line of potential rocket scientists snaked around the Schwartz gazebo. After the launch, the scouts would dash down the hill trying to retrieve theirs and yelling "Don't go into the water!"

None appeared lost, fortunately.

Scouting is a great program for kids (and adults), and we are grateful for Marcus and his fellow leaders for providing these opportunities.

Marcus has been involved with Scouting since he was 11 and from the smile on his face that day as he helped prepare and repair rockets, it looks like he was having just as much fun as the kids.





# Thanks to our newest Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy members and continuing donors

Thank you to our local community members whose yearly contributions keep Willow Waterhole a beautiful urban green space. The list below reflects new members and donors from September 2021 through December 2021.

Individual Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
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- Rostislav Fridhaim\*
- Kenneth Grissom
- Amy Kolflat
- Gregory Lindquist
- Leslie Santamaria
- Christina Valdez
- James Wesselman

- Bill and Gabrielle Baumeyer
- John and Nancy Graves
- Peggy and Dabney Kennedy
- Winston Kile
- Kathryn Lopez
- Regina Novak
- Teresa Palmer
- Mark Picus
- Sylvia Rivas
- Jared Rubenstein
- Julieta Ruppert
- David and Kelley Tobin

- Terri E. Bourne
- Ray and Val Runge
- Andrew Sikora
- Edith and Vincent Smith

### VETERAN MEMBERS:\*

We have one new individual member who is a veteran. We are very grateful for all who serve here and abroad.



## Paved and ready to roll: Dryad parking lot

It took patience, determination, and cooperation, but we finally have a paved road and parking lot on Dryad. What a difference it makes when you visit the greenspace and drive into the area with a beautiful entryway and parking spaces.

We are extremely grateful for Brays Oaks Management District, City Council District K, and all the individuals that “paved” the way to make this happen.



# Conservancy Membership

There are lots of wonderful causes to support, and for us at Willow Waterhole, the Greenway is near and dear to our heart. We wanted to share a bit about why membership matters to us.



## Why become a member of Willow Waterhole?

Many have realized what a great place the Willow Waterhole is and how much greater it can be. Events for the entire community must be planned, bills must be paid, and environmental enhancements such as tables, benches and most importantly, TREES, are needed.

This park belongs to the community, and the more people who become involved in these projects, the more enjoyment it will provide for all.

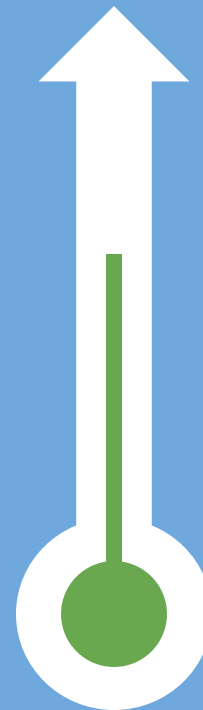
We need a minimum of 200 members to form the base for this organization.

- **Individual Member:** The Conservancy is asking for an annual contribution of only \$50 from each of these members.
- **Supporting Member:** For those who can afford to pay more, a contribution of \$100 or more is necessary to become a Supporting Member.
- **Sustaining Member:** For those who wish to provide funding for long term projects, a donation of \$500 or more will be needed to be designated as a Sustaining Member.

If you are a Supporting or Sustaining Member, your spouse will automatically be considered a member.

We are also soliciting donations for capital improvements and to produce the popular MusicFest. The Willow Waterhole is a hidden jewel and can provide a model for the future on how to combine flood control and greenspace. Learn more: [willowwaterhole.org](http://willowwaterhole.org).

**Yearly Goal:**  
200 members



**Current Count:**  
157 members



# Conservation updates

## September 2021

- **Eagle project:** Ten park benches restored at Westbury and Willow Lakes, added scout logos and informational signage along the sidewalk near the Dryad parking lot.

## October 2021

- **Waste Management senior leadership team:** spread mulch, pulled weeds, took out freeze damaged trees, cleared brush, and picked up litter on Ricecrest.
- **Troop 211 from St. Mark's Episcopal:** Cleaned up Bayou Trail and dismantled insect house.
- **Interfaith Environmental Network:** Helped set up MusicFest banners on Chimney Rock, South Willow, Gasmer, and Dryad, pulled invasive vines, installed a street sign, and painted a security gate.

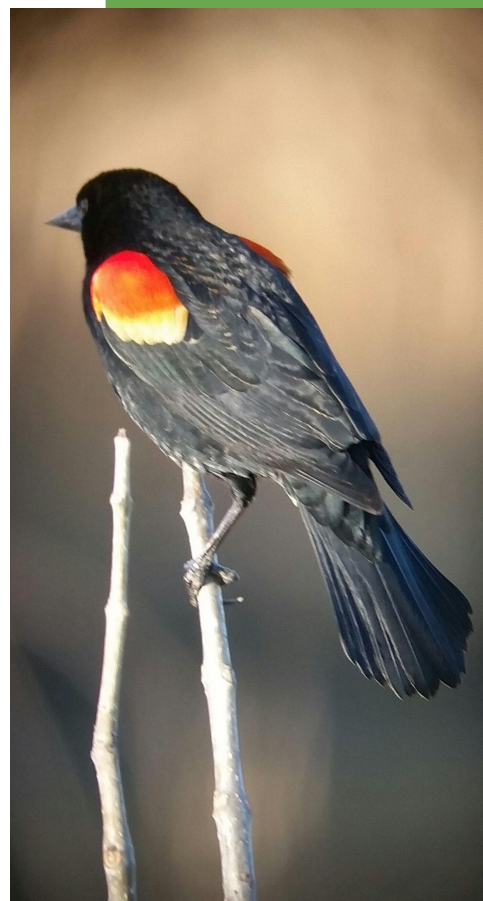
## November 2021

- **Two more trees:** Planted at Rafferty Memorial in honor of Dabney Kennedy and his brother, Birch, who started the Tiger Scout Program.
- **Cub Scouts (Nov. 6):** Rocket launch day
- **Shell Oil geologists (Nov. 9):** Planted 20 new trees donated by TFH on Gasmer by WHS tennis courts; also donated \$400.
- **Girl Scouts (Nov. 14):** Spread wildflower seeds on banks near the Schwartz Gazebo for their Silver Awards.
- **St. Catherine Dominican Convent (Nov. 14):** Held "Annual Day Out" at the Greenway for elderly Sisters.
- **Keep Houston Beautiful (Nov. 18):** WWGC awarded Keep Houston Beautiful Mayor's Proud Partner Award.

## Interested in birding at WW?

Join the bird watching group that meets every third Saturday of every month.

Contact Mary Ann at: [mbeauch@naturediscoverycenter.org](mailto:mbeauch@naturediscoverycenter.org).



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## Snapshots: Electric Biking the Waterhole

Our most famous electric bike rider at Willow Waterhole is Russell Schexnayder. On your next visit to the Arboretum Trail near Ricecrest, check out the new signage with his photo and information on his many contributions to the community and Greenway.



## 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](mailto:volunteer@willowwaterhole.org) or tag us on Facebook.

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### Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy

Park Address:  
5300 Dryad Drive, Houston, TX 77035  
Email: [info@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:info@willowwaterhole.org)  
[www.willowwaterhole.org](http://www.willowwaterhole.org)

