

# The Watering Hole

*The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter*



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## New things blossoming

Springtime may soon be coming to an end, but new activities and projects at the Willow Waterhole Greenway are just starting to blossom.

The Gasmer Redevelopment master plan will be shared in a community meeting in late April while construction on the new trails at Westbury Lake begins in May. Whatever your activity of choice, we encourage you to explore all the Waterhole has to offer on our almost 300 acres.

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## The pier is near: Conservancy closes in on fundraising goal for new feature at Westbury Lake

Thanks to the largest single private donation by longtime volunteers and advocates, Janie and Russell Schexnayder, we are hopeful the pier on Westbury Lake will be completed this year.

Janie and Russell have been instrumental in shaping the Willow Waterhole Greenway since the inception of the park.

The original idea to build a stormwater detention facility dates back to a 1983 rain event that flooded 1,800 homes in Meyerland and Willow Meadows.

Janie spent countless hours at the Harris County Appraisal District office reviewing land records (eventually producing 80 parcels for purchase) and prices, while Russell researched detention basin design and economics at the Harris County Flood Control District office.

The couple's efforts were highlighted in the Spring 2021 edition of the Watering Hole.

The current projected budget for the pier is \$225,000. With the Kinder Foundation match grant, the Conservancy needs to raise at least \$112,500. Currently, we have raised over 80 percent of our goal.

The pier will be used by people who fish, canoe, and kayak, as well as by Westbury High School's science department. We encourage you to support this worthwhile project to enhance the Greenway.

To donate, visit [willowwaterhole.org/support](http://willowwaterhole.org/support) and click **Donate Now**, select **Capital Projects** from the menu, and type in **Pier**.

For questions about the pier, please contact Bill King at [billking77035@gmail.com](mailto:billking77035@gmail.com).

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Site of the future pier



# The Gasmer Redevelopment plan is ready for to view at an upcoming public meeting

In fall 2021, the City of Houston requested that the Brays Oaks Management District (BOMD) commission a master redevelopment plan for the 29 acres at the former Shell Research Facility located at 5521 Gasmer Drive.

To accomplish this, BOMD retained the architectural design services of Lionheart and Natalye Appel + Associates.

The design team, along with community stakeholders, have been meeting the last few months working faithfully on the design. They are now ready to present their master plan to the community at a public meeting on **Saturday, April 30, 2022.**

Please join us for this informational meeting to learn more about the exciting ideas being proposed for this site.

## Community Meeting:

Listen to and view the master plan prepared for the Gasmer Redevelopment plan

**April 30, 2022**  
**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**  
**Westbury High School Auditorium**



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## The Gathering Place: Learning about the inspiring work of our neighbors

Many visitors to Willow Waterhole are familiar with The Gathering Place's (TGP) signage on South Willow Drive. However, some have likely wondered, "Who gathers there and why?"

On a recent visit to meet one of our neighbors, we learned about their work and mission to support families in Houston.

The Gathering Place offers a welcoming community to adults who are recovering from serious and persistent mental illnesses. By focusing on strengths, not limitations, TGP assists members in pursuing healthy life choices and more independent living.

Through their programs, members are empowered to integrate back into the community, build teamwork abilities, relearn life skills, and rebuild self-esteem while experiencing acceptance and belonging. The services are offered for free.

In 1984, three mothers were united by their shared experiences of having adult children with serious mental illness. At that time, few programs existed to help those with severe psychiatric diseases achieve independent community living.

They wanted a place where their children could find acceptance, friendship, and opportunities to learn and grow. With this dream, they officially opened TGP in 1986. Since that time, TGP has served thousands as a safe haven for those in need of its unique services. Approximately 70 members visit daily.



Members come for the day, Monday through Friday, and attend educational groups, exercise classes, field trips and more.

Sample activities include:

- Participating in outreach and supporting public relations
- Running the Urban Market and learning to cook
- Answering phones and greeting visitors to The Gathering Place

Their wellness program provides access to a gym, training equipment, basketball court, yoga classes, and more.

Through the vocational training program, members' career interests are assessed and matched with potential employment opportunities. Classes are offered in art, communications, foreign language, and technology through its computer lab. Socialization is encouraged through group discussions, games, and volunteer activities.

[Continues on the next page](#)

## The Gathering Place: Learning about the inspiring work of our neighbors (cont.)

All of this could not happen without the leadership of Shalla Parker, who has dedicated her love and time to TGP for the last two decades as program manager.

On our tour, we were impressed by the beauty of the facilities and the genuine warmth and support of the staff. We are grateful to have TGP as our neighbor!

TPG is part of the Menninger Clinic, so visit [www.menningerclinic.org](http://www.menningerclinic.org) to learn more.



**Shalla Parker, MA, MS**

## Rodney Ellis, Harris Co. Commissioner, Precinct One, announces combining flood protection and greenspace

Greenspace and recreational opportunities help communities stay active and healthy.

The existing walking, jogging and biking trails around the Willow Waterhole detention basin will be expanded to a total of 3.5 miles around Westbury Lake.

Residents will enjoy more trails to stay active while the county maintains the vital flood protection of the basin.

Combining flood protection with new parklands and recreational areas help communities become more resilient.

This project is currently scheduled to begin in May 2022. Weather permitting, the completion date will be November 2022. To keep up with the project visit: [www.hcp1.net/WillowWaterholeTrails](http://www.hcp1.net/WillowWaterholeTrails).

### Coming this year!

New paved and gravel trails around Westbury Lake totaling 3.5 miles





## Local resident competes in Texas Water Safari

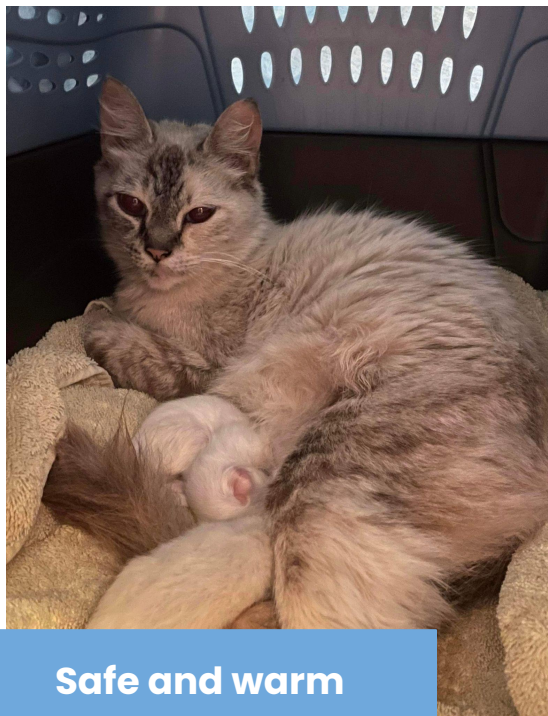
The Texas Water Safari is called the “world’s toughest canoe race.”

Competitors have four days and four hours to paddle from San Marcos to Seadrift on the Gulf Coast, a total of 260 miles. Racers must take all equipment needed with them, and can only receive water, food, and ice along the way.

We have our own local paddler in the race, Matt. He is a new Westbury resident and practices several days a week at Willow Waterhole with his 28 pound sea kayak made of carbon fiber .

The official start date is June 11, so if you see him out paddling wish him luck!

Off to the safari



Safe and warm

## Mother and newborn kittens rescued at WW

Last month while out walking on Ricecrest, two visitors that do a weekly trash pick up around Willow Waterhole helped rescue a family of cats.

They discovered the mom and her newborn kittens (with umbilical cords still attached) in a box next to the curb. A quick call for help was placed to Houston Cares Animal Rescue. A volunteer shortly arrived with a carrier and blankets to transport them.

The happy family is now in a foster home in Chicago thanks to the Rescued Pet Movement. It takes a village!

## Board member profile: Tony and Donna Robert

Tony and Donna Robert have served as Corresponding Secretaries for the past two years, but their support of the Willow Waterhole has been growing for years.

As residents of Westbury for 46 years, they have witnessed the area's flood control concerns, as well as the progress made in helping to resolve these issues.

Tony and Donna have participated in various other community organizations, but they have devoted their most recent efforts toward helping to increase the membership of the Willow Waterhole Conservancy.

A large part of their love for the Waterhole comes from their lifelong passion for all things natural. For most of their retirement years, they have traveled to some of the most beautiful places in the U.S., including hiking at Mount Rainier, Yellowstone, Bryce Canyon, the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Tetons, and Big Bend.

For a tree lover, there is no place better than Sequoia National Park. Their most exhilarating experience was hiking to the bottom of Grand Canyon. There are still many places they want to visit or see again.

Tony and Donna support environmental organizations that help to improve the planet, including the Sierra Club, Earthjustice, and Nature Conservancy.

Conservation and preservation are a major focus for the Roberts in making the world a better place. They established an endowed scholarship at Baylor University in environmental science to demonstrate this commitment.



**Donna and Tony and their Naturescape sculpture**

“Being members of the board of directors has enabled us to associate with like-minded people whose values include dedication to the community and the environment,” shared the Roberts. “We want to find more people who are willing to give their time and resources toward improving the Greenway.”

In 2022, the Conservancy hopes to enroll at least 200 members. Membership fees help pay operational expenses while larger donations are needed to generate capital improvements.

Please join Tony, Donna, and other volunteers in pursuing the goals of the Conservancy.



## Getting to know the plants of Willow Waterhole: The white fringe tree

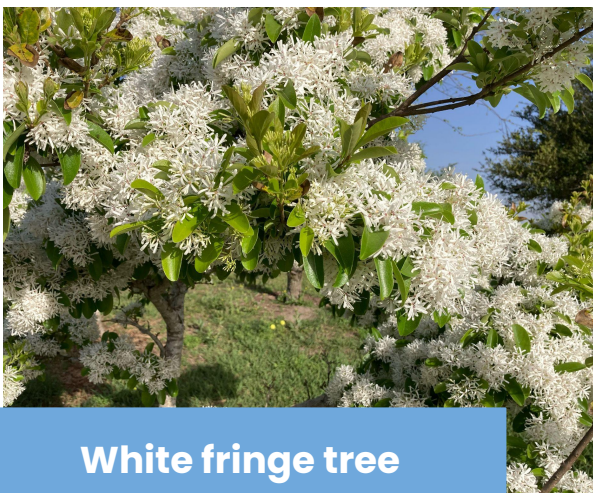
This spring, near the Schwarz Gazebo, you will find beautiful white fringe trees loaded from top to bottom with blossoms.

In 1737, Linnaeus named this plant *chionanthus virginicus*, which is derived from a combination of the Greek words *chion* (snow) and *anthos* (flower). Its many common names include old man's beard, Grancy graybeard, flowering ash, white fringe tree, or simply fringe tree, which most people prefer.

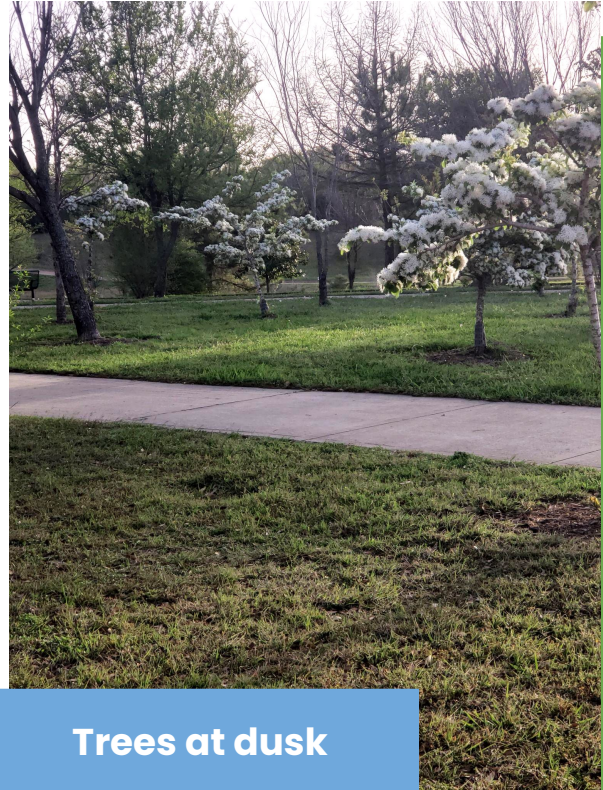
It is related to the lilac, privet, forsythia, jasmine, ash tree and olive tree.

Native to the U.S., fringe tree originated in Missouri and eventually spread throughout the eastern half of the country as far north as New Jersey, south to Florida, and west to Oklahoma and Texas.

Its appeal lies in its generous clusters of fragrant, fringed white blossoms, which appear in late spring after other trees have finished blooming.



**White fringe tree**



**Trees at dusk**

The fringe tree is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers occur on different plants. The male flowers tend to be showier than female flowers, but both are lovely.

Each flower is comprised of four long, narrow petals and occurs in drooping, four to eight-inch long clusters at the ends of the branches.

When in full bloom, the delicate, airy-looking blossoms give the tree a cloud-like appearance. The flowers give off a delicate, sweet, spicy fragrance, making the plant all the more endearing in the spring landscape.



# 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 greenspace. The list below reflects new members and donors from January to March 2022.

Individual Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beverly Feldman</li> <li>• Julie Fitzgerald</li> <li>• Amelia Gottlieb</li> <li>• Holly Martin</li> <li>• Mary Stancel</li> <li>• Randy Zercher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• George and Tammy Arnold</li> <li>• Dan and Kathryn Burton</li> <li>• Thomas Compson</li> <li>• Jennifer Davis</li> <li>• Lisa and Tom Gossett</li> <li>• Marty Melosi</li> <li>• Sarah and Michael Menendez</li> <li>• Deborah and Bill Rapp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greg Egan</li> <li>• Cheryl Hirsch-Ginsberg</li> <li>• Terry and Jeff Techmanski</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="1079 751 1485 949" style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><b>THANK YOU!</b> Your membership helps support programming like MusicFest.</p> </div>

## Save the date: MusicFest Oct. 2022

Thanks to all who joined us for the 9th annual MusicFest in April. We enjoyed the festivities and tasty food trucks.

A second day of MusicFest 2022 will be held on **Saturday, October 29, 2022.**

Once again, there will be live music, food, fun, and Halloween activities including a haunted house maze and trunk or treat.

If you're interested in sponsoring the event or volunteering, please contact Events Chair, Howard Sacks, at [sackshow@aol.com](mailto:sackshow@aol.com).



# Conservation updates

## January 2022

- **New chairperson:** Brett Byers is the Conservation and Maintenance chair. Bill Burhans will remain as an advisor.
- **New trails:** Western Industrial Contracting Company was awarded \$2.4 million for the construction of trails at Westbury Lake.
- **New trees:** The Harris Count Flood Control District planted 50 trees at Willow Lake.
- **More trees:** Girl Scouts planted two pine trees at Kennedy Scout Pavilion and replaced one wax myrtle at the AT&T fenceline.
- **Brush clearing:** Troop 99 held a maintenance work day at Bayou Trail. They removed non-native invasive brush, raked the trail, and sealed tree ID posts to prevent water damage.

## February 2022

- **First TFH event:** Trees for Houston volunteers planted multiple trees at Westbury Lake.
- **Second TFH event:** Trees for Houston planted 74 tribute trees on Feb. 12.
- **Tribute tree:** Cherry Laurel tree planted to replace a failed tribute tree.
- **Open house:** An open house was held on Feb. 12 at the Gasmer Redevelopment space.

## March-April 2022

- **Improved fencing:** Screening was applied to the apartment fence near the Dryad entrance.
- **Parking:** Handicapped spaces were painted near the Gazebo.
- **Bat Mitzvah:** Work party held on March 27.
- **IES event:** Interfaith Environmental Stewardship event held on April 24.

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## Bird Watching

In March, 28 people came out to help with the WW spring bird survey.

Among the three survey groups, 43 species were identified.

A highlight of the morning was a swamp sparrow (pictured below).





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## Snapshots: Native prairie garden

The Willow Waterhole's native prairie garden is in full bloom. A team of volunteers, led by Hazel Potvin, has been dutifully maintaining the garden each season. The prairie garden will also be a stop on the upcoming "Ready or Not" Willow Garden Trail tour, which includes self-guided tours of community and home gardens. To register for the free event, visit [www.eventbrite.com/e/willow-garden-trail](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/willow-garden-trail).



## 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:  
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[www.willowwaterhole.org](http://www.willowwaterhole.org)

