

Urban arboretum will be lasting legacy

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This one's for posterity.

The results of dual grants received by the organizations United Crestview Area Neighbors and Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed from the Columbus Foundation won't be evident for quite some time to come, but the eventual urban arboretum in the Glen Echo Ravine will be a present to many future generations.

"The goal is to put back what was once here," said Peter Kovarik, a member of the UCAN board of directors and a biological and physical sciences instructor at Columbus State Community College.

"The chain of events that led to the grant submission was set in motion by Clintonville resident Julie Smiley," according to Clintonville Area Commission member Mike McLaughlin, who announced receipt of the two grants, totaling a little over \$12,000, earlier this month. "She had begun work with the city staffers to have all Clintonville residential public right-of-way areas between the curb and sidewalk reforested over the next several years.

"This led to the establishment of a UCAN working group which ended up discussing the benefits of planting only native species saplings to benefit wildlife, reduce runoff, and to restore the green canopy in our neighborhood that once connected this ravine with Walhalla Ravine to the north."

For her part, Smiley said that she just helped get the right people together after having talks with Kovarik regarding his vision of connecting the Glen Echo and Walhalla ravines with a canopy of trees, not just any trees but native trees.

"Things that are local tend to thrive better in the environment they come from," Kovarik said.

"That's kind of what sparked it," Smiley said. "We met and just started brainstorming."

"Fate just sort of put us all together, and we all just shared the vision of putting back what once was," Kovarik said.

"This is when UCAN resident John Krygier came up with the idea of creating an urban arboretum," McLaughlin wrote in a statement regarding the grants.

Eventually, a United Crestview Area Neighbors working group brought in FLOW, which according to its website is a "nonprofit organization dedicated to keeping the Olentangy River and its tributaries clean and safe for all to enjoy, through public education, volunteer activities, and coordination with local decision makers," as well as the Glen Echo Neighbors civic association, according to McLaughlin.

FLOW and UCAN submitted grant proposals to the Jeffrey Fund of the Columbus Foundation in the fall. Kovarik said he was expecting one of the two, but not both, would get funded this time

around, meaning only a single phase of the planting could have begun. He was pleasantly surprised that both came through.

"The total of both grants is a little over \$12,000 and provides funding for the purchase of canopy saplings, printing of brochures, a student intern stipend and markers/signs for significant trees," McLaughlin wrote in his press release. "Both grants also require that property owners of those lots identified in need of a sapling having the right to opt out and decline the planting. The Clintonville-Beechwold Community Resources Center has agreed to be UCAN's fiscal agent for the grant. Many other organizations and individuals have also volunteered their time and ideas to bring this project into being. My heartfelt thanks goes out to all of them.

"This is a reminder that great things can happen for the entire community when people can cross boundaries, reach out to others, and are motivated to work in the spirit of cooperation for the greater good," McLaughlin added.

"We will get going this spring," Kovarik said.

But it's a long-term project, he cautioned.

"It's going to take many years to get this done, simply because we don't have many trees to draw from that are the size the city would want to plant," Kovarik said.

"I would say probably in about 10 years," Smiley said. "We have some similar street trees planted on my street, and it took 10 years, plus or minus, to really start to see something neat happening.

"Right now it's just going to be twigs."

And while it will take years for the urban arboretum to fully take shape, it's a project that has the potential for lasting centuries.

"I think that's what it's all about," Smiley said. "We inherited a mess from people who just weren't aware of what they were doing, but we know better now. Because we know better, it's our responsibility to do better."

"This was my point to Julie, this is a one-shot deal," Kovarik said. "This is one chance. Trees last several hundred years, so if we're going to do it, if we're going to plant this area, why not do it right."

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