

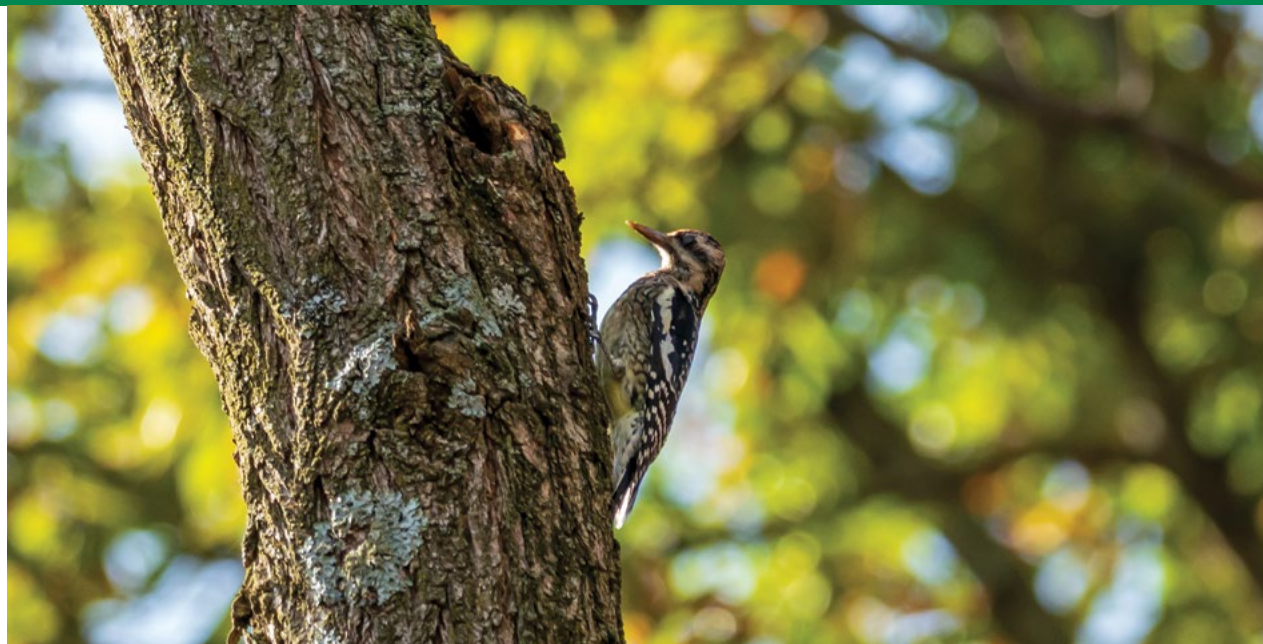


MONTGOMERY PARKS
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FALL • 2025



DONOR SPOTLIGHT:

Meet the Walker Family

Parks can shape a life – a truth the Walker family knows firsthand. Alexandra grew up in Montgomery County but never spent much time exploring all that the parks had to offer. It wasn't until she met her husband, Ken, an avid outdoorsman, and started a family, that she discovered how lucky they were to have some of the best parks in the country, right in their backyard.



When their daughters, Samantha and Eliza, were little, the parks offered an escape – a way for everyone to burn off energy at the end of a long day, Ken said, “we would get them outside to play in the mud or go down to Cabin John and throw rocks in the stream. It was just important to us for them to spend time outside.” He knew these early days spent playing, exploring and creating family memories would lay the foundation for his daughters to have a life-long love of Montgomery County Parks – “I was always thinking, well, we'll make sure they like the outdoors and sort of prime them for enjoying that later in life because I still want to do things outside...so, I was kind of training them to be my adventure buddies.”

All those early years spent in the parks as a family made a lasting impact on Samantha and Eliza. Ken frequently goes trail running through different areas like Cabin John, Muddy Branch, and Seneca Greenway trails with his daughters – Montgomery County's extensive trail system means they haven't had to repeat a run route yet! Camping, backpacking, and hiking are chosen pastimes for the Walker girls, something that might not be the case without the easy access to public parks they always enjoyed “if they hadn't been exposed to [the parks] early on, and we didn't have those resources, then that would have been a lot more difficult, and probably wouldn't have happened,” said Alexandra.

Ken and Alexandra Walker understand the importance that Montgomery County Parks play in building strong families and communities. They have seen firsthand how the parks have played a major role in shaping who their daughters have become, so when they received an appeal to join the Seedling Society, a monthly giving program, they knew it was their chance to give back. As Alexandra said, “The parks have given us so much. They've enriched our lives in so many different ways and really helped to develop the character of our children...having these things available that are completely free. For me, it was a no-brainer, of course we want to give back!”

Investing in our parks isn't just about maintaining green spaces – it's about investing in people and communities. Together, we can create a greener, stronger, more active Montgomery County.

A MURAL FOR GLENMONT:

Community Voices to Shape Public Art

Big changes are coming to Glenmont Local Park! With support from the Montgomery Parks Foundation, Montgomery Parks is bringing a vibrant, community-inspired mural to the park's activity building—a project that celebrates the neighborhood's unique history, values, and hopes for the future.

It all began in August 2024, when Montgomery Parks invited community members to share their ideas through an online survey. Residents were asked what stories and symbols they'd like to see reflected on their park building—and the response was full of energy and heart.

By June 2025, the project took another exciting step: a public call for artists. From 26 submissions, a jury made up of local educators, longtime residents, and park staff selected four talented finalists. Each was awarded a stipend to create a design tailored to the Glenmont community.

The public decided the winner. Community voting opened on August 4, and residents could vote online, by email, by mail, or in person throughout the month. The winning design will be unveiled this fall and installed by November 2025.

"We are so excited to support this project to bring art to this park while also showcasing the values and culture of this part of the community," said Katie Rictor, Executive Director of the Montgomery Parks Foundation. "We eagerly anticipate the winning design!"

This project is more than paint on a wall—it's a celebration of the people who call Glenmont home.



Connecting People to Parks Through Food

Nothing beats the taste of a sun-warmed tomato fresh from the vine—especially when it comes from your very own garden. Beyond the joy of harvesting locally grown produce, community gardening contributes to both individual well-being and broader community health. Research continues to show that community gardening has a positive impact on mental and physical health while also providing equitable access to fresh, nutritious food.

The Montgomery Parks Community Garden Program has been serving residents since 2009, when the first garden opened at Sligo Mill Overlook Park with just 33 plots. Today, the program supports more than 500 families across Montgomery County, providing public parkland for local food and flower cultivation. Thanks to growing demand, the program has expanded to 14 gardens, with two more locations planned for the near future.

For those who don't have a plot but still want to get their hands in the soil, there are other meaningful ways to engage. Volunteers are always welcome at Pope Farm, a Montgomery Parks property where Grown@Pope focuses on sustainable farming practices, community building, and the cultivation of diverse, culturally important crops. Through the Grown@Pope initiative, volunteers assist with planting, harvesting, and general farm maintenance, all while supporting the program's mission to connect people to parks through food. Since its inception in 2020, Grown@Pope has seen remarkable growth—more than 250 volunteers contributed their time in 2024 alone. All produce harvested is donated to food-insecure households across the county.

The Community Garden Program also offers educational and community engagement opportunities through Foodie Fridays, a seasonal speaker series held from June through September. These events explore local food systems and culinary culture in Montgomery County.

The Montgomery Parks Foundation assists in securing financial support for events like Foodie Fridays by facilitating donations from Wegmans and monthly gifts from RELISH Market. This has helped sustain and expand the reach of these programs. “While this support may seem nominal, this expands our offerings and stretches our budget to support our garden community,” says Michelle Nelson, Manager of the Community Garden Program. “We are so grateful to Wegman’s, RELISH, and the Foundation for supporting and sponsoring the Community Garden Program.”

These gardens cultivate more than just food; they nurture new friendships and inspire a deeper appreciation for the environment.



In coordination with HarvestShare and volunteers, 2,324 pounds of produce were harvested and donated to 4 food assistance providers, including the Gaithersburg Cares Hub and Rainbow Community Development Center.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARIA/ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS



MONTGOMERY PARKS
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OUR NEWEST ADDITION TO THE FOUNDATION TEAM

Meet Julia Charnitsky!

Julia recently joined the Montgomery Parks Foundation as the Community Relations Associate. Her role will focus on growing the Foundation's relationships with community members, local businesses, and civic associations to increase engagement with the Foundation and expand our impact across the community.

Prior to joining the Montgomery Parks Foundation, Julia was a Senior Account Executive at Commonwealth Consultants, where she managed community engagement programs for development projects in Northern Virginia. In her previous role, she developed strategic communications plans for her clients and oversaw the implementation of grassroots and digital campaigns. With an extensive background in event management, Julia excels at leading logistics for public-facing initiatives, including community meetings and high-profile outreach events.

Previously, she was the Programs and Events Coordinator at the Greater Washington Board of Trade, where she planned over 100 events per year for regional business leaders and elected officials. Julia graduated from the University of Mississippi in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

Julia is originally from Houston, TX and now lives in Silver Spring, MD. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and her cat, Skittles. She also enjoys being creative and working on a variety of craft projects, including pottery, sewing, and knitting.

We are so glad to have Julia on board!



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