



MONTGOMERY PARKS
FOUNDATION

FOCUS

SPRING • 2026

FOUNDATION



Introducing Brooks Hanson

We are delighted to introduce Brooks Hanson as a new member of the Board of Trustees for the Montgomery Parks Foundation. With a long and distinguished career in science and scientific publishing, Brooks brings a wealth of experience, insight, and leadership that will be a wonderful asset to our Board and to the Foundation's work.

Brooks recently retired from the American Geophysical Union (AGU), where he served as Executive Vice President for Science. Before joining AGU, Brooks spent more than 25 years at the journal *Science*, one of the world's most influential scientific publications.

Throughout his career, Brooks has been deeply committed to advancing open science, research integrity, and collaboration within the scientific community and across society. He has contributed to national and international initiatives focused on improving access to scientific data, strengthening peer review, fostering community science, and ensuring that research can help address major global challenges, including climate change.

In his free time, Brooks enjoys exploring the outdoors by fishing with his father, Royce, and hiking, gardening, and birdwatching with his longtime partner, Laura. Brooks is excited to support the Montgomery County Park system through his service on the Foundation's Board and will be assuming the role of Treasurer.

Brooks grew up in Montgomery County and worked several summers in Cabin John Park. He returned to the County after graduate school. He lives in Derwood, close to Lake Needwood Park, and regularly visits it and many other parks. He's excited to further the Foundation's mission, recognizing the value of parks and parkland in recreation, research, sustainability, and a vibrant society.

Brooks's passion for science, the environment, and community collaboration will make him a tremendous partner as we continue working to protect and enhance Montgomery County's parks and natural spaces for generations to come.



Brooks Hanson



Marye Wells-Harley

In Memoriam

In February, the Foundation sadly lost a great friend and mentor, Marye Wells-Harley. Marye was a remarkable leader, advocate, and friend to Montgomery County.

Marye devoted decades of service to our community. She recently served as the Vice President of the Board of Trustees for the Montgomery Parks Foundation. Wells-Harley was also the first African American woman on the Montgomery Planning Board, serving from 2009 to 2017.

She was a steadfast champion of thoughtful growth, environmental stewardship, and equitable access to parks and public spaces. Her leadership helped shape a vision for Montgomery County that balanced preservation with progress, ensuring that our park system remains one of our community’s greatest assets.

Beyond her formal roles, Marye was known for her integrity, intellect, and tireless commitment to public service. She believed deeply in the power of parks to connect people to nature, strengthen neighborhoods, and enhance the quality of life for all residents. Her work touched countless lives and will continue to influence our county for generations to come.

In recognition of her extraordinary impact and her belief that every child deserves the opportunity to experience the joy of parks, the **Marye Wells-Harley Dream Camp Scholarship Fund** was created in her honor in 2018.

Since then, this fund has helped send hundreds of children with demonstrated financial need to Montgomery Parks summer camps—opening doors to discovery, friendship, and unforgettable outdoor experiences. It is a fitting tribute to Marye’s enduring commitment to equity and access for all.

Marye’s partnership with the Montgomery Parks Foundation reflected her lifelong dedication to protecting and enhancing our natural spaces. We are profoundly grateful for her guidance, support, and example.

As we reflect on Marye’s life and legacy, we are reminded that the parks and open spaces we cherish today—and the children who will continue to benefit from them—stand as a testament to leaders like her.

Marye Wells-Harley Dream Camp Scholarship Fund

JUMP. CLIMB. PLAY. DIG. EXPLORE.

Last summer, we sent 14 children from Montgomery County to camp thanks to the support of loyal donors to the Marye Wells-Harley Dream Camp Scholarship Fund. The Camp Scholarship Fund ensures that all children, ages 3–18, have access to an exciting summer camp experience.



ILLUSTRATION BY МАРИНА ВАСИЛЬЕВА/ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS

Birdwatching Made Easy

Have you ever noticed a bird that suddenly made you stop and look a little closer? Birders call that moment a “**spark bird.**” It’s the bird that first makes you curious—maybe it was the bright colors, the size, the way it sang, or how it moved through a tree.

The good news is this: birdwatching is one of the easiest hobbies to start. You don’t need special gear, training, or experience. If you enjoy walking in a park, you’re already halfway there.

START SIMPLE

The best way to begin is just to go outside and pay a little more attention than usual. Walk through your favorite park, neighborhood trail, or even your backyard and listen for birds before you look for them.

Early morning is the best time to go. Birds are most active in the first few hours after sunrise, and the parks are quieter, which makes them easier to see and hear.

The more birds you notice, the more fun it becomes. Once you recognize a few, you’ll start spotting them again and again—and that’s when birdwatching really clicks.

WANT TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

If you’re ready to learn a little more, a few simple tools can make birdwatching even easier. You don’t need to use everything at once—just try what feels comfortable and fun.

Here are a few beginner-friendly tips:

- Look up a few birds you might see before you go
- Create a free account on **eBird** so you can keep track of what you see
- Try the **Merlin Bird ID app**, which can help identify birds by sound
- Bring a small notebook to write down what you notice
- If a bird is high in a tree, keep your eyes on it and slowly raise your binoculars
- Notice which trees birds seem to like—some are better for food, some for shelter
- Move slowly and stay quiet so birds feel safe nearby
- Invite a friend or family member to come with you
- Join a community bird walk if you’d like help getting started

MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL: HAVE FUN

You don’t need to know every bird name right away. Just start by noticing them. Over time, your confidence will grow—and before you know it, you’ll have your own “spark bird” story too.



MONTGOMERY PARKS



The 2026 Sligo Creek Fest takes place **Saturday, May 2nd**, from **11 AM to 3 PM** along the Sligo Creek Open Parkway. The Montgomery Parks Foundation is thrilled to be part of this beloved street festival once again! Stop by our tent near the bike valet for coloring and swag. With live music, food vendors, and activities for the whole family, you won’t want to miss this once-a-year community celebration!



Birders at Meadowside Nature Center scoping out the Red-shouldered Hawks and Bald Eagles that frequently soar over the open meadows.

To learn more about birdwatching opportunities and resources, visit the Montgomery Parks birding page, <https://montgomeryparks.org/activities/birding/>.

Special thanks for this article to Adele Medina O’Dowd—an ISA arborist, local ecologist, novice birder, and part of the Little Falls Tree Project science research and education team.

PHOTO BY ADELE MEDINA O’DOWD, BLUE JAY ILLUSTRATION BY ELENA/ADOBE STOCK PHOTOS



MONTGOMERY PARKS
FOUNDATION

2425 Reedie Drive
12th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Different Ways to Grow Your Impact

Are you looking for a way to deepen your support for Montgomery County Parks? If so, we encourage you to learn more about our three different giving groups to see which one makes the most sense for you and your family! All three options enable our donors to make the biggest impact possible, ensuring our parks system will be thriving for generations to come.

- **Oak Legacy Society:** Our loyal donors who value the significant role our parks play in our lives and community by including the Montgomery Parks Foundation in their estate plans. These donors help ensure our abundant park system endures for generations to come.
- **Seedling Society:** A dedicated group of donors who make recurring monthly donations to provide foundational and ongoing support to our park system.
- **1993 Circle:** Our new leadership giving society honoring donors who invest \$1,000 or more each year in the future of Montgomery County's parks. These donors provide pivotal leadership support that is the foundation for transformative impact in our park system.

If you want to learn more or join one of these groups, please contact Anna Joyce, Development Manager, at anna.joyce@montgomeryparks.org.



Donor event attendees



MONTGOMERY PARKS
FOUNDATION



montgomeryparksfoundation.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

OFFICERS

Trish Heffelfinger, *President*
Brooks Hanson, *Treasurer*
Jane Houlihan, *Secretary*

AT LARGE

Rhonda Cunningham-Holmes
Devin Ellis
Alison Gillespie
Scott Goldberg
Clara Lovett
Catherine Matthews
John Robinson

EX-OFFICIO

Miti Figueredo, *Director, Montgomery Parks*
Artie Harris, *Planning Board Chair*

FOUNDATION STAFF

Katie Rictor, *Executive Director*
Julia Charnitsky, *Community Relations Associate*
Anna Joyce, *Development Manager*
Jaelyn Riedel, *Marketing and Corporate Sponsorship Manager*

FOUNDATION FOCUS
SPRING 2026