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gift—this
week only!
see page 5

OVERTON PARK

notes

spring 2015

Welcome to the Old Forest State Natural Area

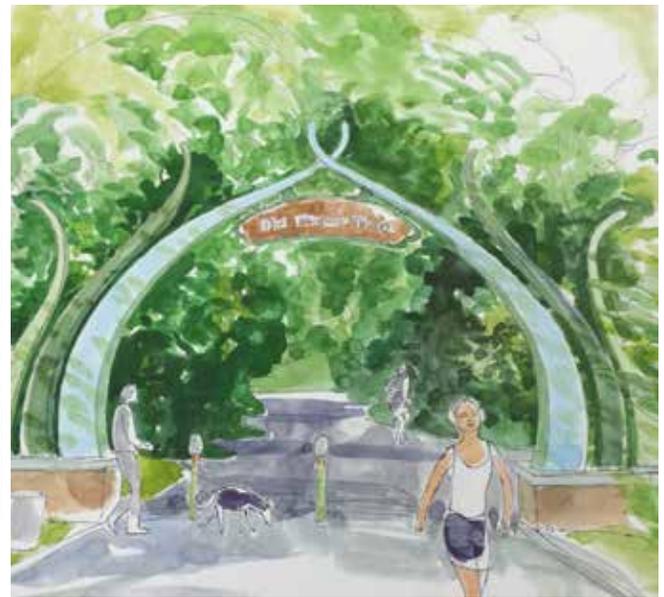


“KEEP OUT.”

The iron bars that greet visitors at three entrances to the Old Forest are anything but welcoming. Designed to prohibit vehicles from entering the State Natural Area, the gates accomplish something unintended as well: discouraging pedestrians and cyclists from enjoying the forest trails.

But thanks to a generous gift from some lifelong park lovers, the Old Forest will soon invite people in through new gateways that are as unique as Overton Park itself.

Later this year, construction will begin on new gateways at each of the three Old Forest entrances: East Parkway, Overton Bark, and the golf clubhouse. They were designed by a different local artist: Yvonne Bobo, known for her kinetic sculptures; Ben Butler, whose works are intricate and layered; and Tylur French, who also created the Bike Gate arch.



The artists were chosen as winners of a competition juried by Overton Park Conservancy’s Design Advisory Committee, which includes members of our board and the community. Artists were asked to craft design concepts that would offer visitors information about the forest and encourage them to explore it. One of the most important aspects of the three designs selected is that they enhance the natural beauty of the forest rather than obscuring it.

It’s a fitting addition to a park that has always married nature and artistic expression. Donors Henry & Lynne Turley and Bill & Becky Deupree were moved to fund this project because of their shared history with the park. Henry and Bill were childhood friends, and their memories of the park span decades.

“When we were kids Bill lived near the park,” Henry recalls. “I’d visit him and we’d go straight over and explore its wonders.”

continued on page 4



In 2013, the Overton Park Conservancy board of directors sat down to develop a strategic plan that would guide our focus for the next few years. From that planning session, our vision statement emerged: to develop a beautiful, safe, and welcoming park that encourages our diverse community to explore, learn, create, socialize, and play.

One of our goals in this plan focuses on the Old Forest State Natural Area – a magnificent and unique feature that sets Overton Park apart from other urban parks. From analyzing and improving the ecological health of the forest, to sharing its beauty and encouraging others to explore it, we're taking steps to cultivate the next generation of conservationists and make sure the forest they protect is as awe-inspiring as the one we enjoy now.

We can't do this work alone. Just as a group of activists saved Overton Park and the Old Forest from expressway construction decades ago, we need an informed and motivated group of supporters to help us implement our Old Forest State Natural Area management plan. It takes about \$18,000 per week to manage the park, and nearly \$1,500 of that is dedicated to the Old Forest.

More than 100 years ago, forward-thinking Memphians recognized the need to invest in quality parks and green space for our growing city. Approximately 50 years ago, some "little old ladies in tennis shoes" were determined to keep Overton Park out the path of bulldozers. Your investment in Overton Park today adds your name to Overton Park's rich history and keeps it thriving.



We're so often asked, "What can I do for the park?" In this newsletter, whenever you see our green Overton Park logo, that lets you know there's an opportunity to take action. Whether that's through donating to a project, attending an event, or offering your feedback, there are always plenty of ways for you to show your support. We appreciate a contribution on any level.

Tina Sullivan

staff & board

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Proposals would improve parking, sidewalks

Overton Park offers shady picnic areas, two playgrounds, a dog park, and miles of trails. The park is also fortunate to have so many cultural institutions all sharing space. Having a world-class zoo, art museum, art college, and performing arts facility all nestled within a beautiful park is a rare privilege, amounting to a treasure that's uniquely Memphis.

Over time, as the park and its attractions have grown in popularity, it has become more difficult to accommodate all the cars entering the park. To accommodate more than one million visitors per year, the Memphis Zoo received permission from the City of Memphis to allow overflow parking on the park's Greensward during busy days. This arrangement was made many years before the Conservancy was created to manage the park, and the Mayor's office has offered this permission through January 1, 2019.

The City of Memphis, Overton Park Conservancy, and the Memphis Zoo discussed a parking deck built on Zoo property as a permanent solution to the overflow parking problem. But with cost estimates in the millions, it could take many years to raise enough money to build a garage.

So we continue to work together on other creative alternatives. The City of Memphis' Division of Parks & Neighborhoods has proposed a solution that would add about 350 new parking spaces to the park.

N. Parkway Improvements

The first component would involve making some long-needed improvements to existing sidewalks along N. Parkway. As an added bonus, these improvements benefit pedestrians both in and around Overton Park.

Overton Park Conservancy has put a major focus on improving bicycle and pedestrian access to the park. In 2013, we proposed that the Memphis Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) grant the City funding for several park access improvements. The MPO granted \$422,000 to the City to enhance sidewalk access on the park's perimeter. To access these dollars, the Conservancy must raise another \$87,000 in matching funds.

The Conservancy and the City have determined that the best and most urgent use of these funds is to repair the broken sidewalks along N. Parkway between McLean and University and extend them to the park entrance. This will enable the City to add both bike lanes and a street parking lane that will hold



up to 100 cars. Because of the proximity to the Zoo's N. Parkway entrance, these 100 spaces could be filled with Zoo employee parking, freeing up spaces in the existing lots.

Parking Lot Improvements

Additionally, the Division of Parks & Neighborhoods determined that a redesign of the Zoo's main parking area could create 250 additional spaces with minimal impact to Overton Park. A design process will be undertaken this year, with concepts ready for public review this summer. Construction and landscaping will occur in phases during the winter off-season. If needed, the Greensward would serve as overflow parking during the construction process.

Together, the two projects should reduce the impact to the Greensward, both in the number of days it is used and the extent to which it is used on those days. While these projects may not be a total solution, they represent a significant improvement over current conditions and come at a relatively low price tag.

We are excited to move forward with solutions that create noticeable improvements to the park. As we work on this issue with our partners at the City and the Zoo, we ask that you consider visiting the park car-free when possible, especially on nice days when the traffic is likely to be heavy. We appreciate your patience and above all, your investment in the park's future.



If you'd like to donate to the effort to improve the N. Parkway sidewalks so a parking lane can be added, visit www.overtonpark.org/give or return a check in the envelope provided here.

Welcome to the Old Forest (continued)

“The park police officer kept a close eye on us,” he continues. “We’ll never forget the evening, after some miscreance, that we successfully eluded his chase by hiding flat on the ground – but in a field of poison ivy.”

Henry and Bill view the new gateways as a gift for all the people who use the park, but they hold special significance as a tribute to their mothers, Cordelia Turley and Mary Evelyn Deupree. In fact, Bill’s mother led in the improbable but successful battle to stop I-40 before it penetrated the Old Forest. The group that would become Citizens to Preserve Overton Park met at Mary Evelyn’s home in the 1960s. There, they made their plans for the lawsuit that would ultimately block the highway from bisecting the park.

Their mothers’ investment continues to pay dividends today, and Henry and Bill’s love for the park has never diminished. “When the chance to embellish the park arose, we jumped at it,” Henry says.

Once installed in early 2016, the new gateways will offer trail maps and interpretive information about the forest, while creating elegant solutions to keeping vehicles out. While recalling Bike Gate’s arched entry, these gateways will be smaller and more human-scaled to honor their proximity to the natural area.



To view artist’s renderings of the gateway designs, visit www.overtonpark.org/welcome.

Soar over the park at A Day of Merrymaking

While we’re not 100% sure, we think this year’s Day of Merrymaking may come with an Overton Park first. During our annual family festival on **Saturday, June 6** from 10:00 - 3:00, you’ll be able to soar over the park in a hot air balloon provided by Bluff City Balloons. It’ll give you an unprecedented vantage point over the park and the Old Forest—weather permitting, of course!

The balloon, which will remain tethered to the ground and go up in many short flights throughout the day, will be the centerpiece of a day that’s full of music, games, activities, food trucks, and so much more. Hollywood Feed will bring back its popular water slide for kids, as well as tons of fun for dogs.

The music stage will feature live performances by Alexis Grace and other exciting acts to be announced soon.

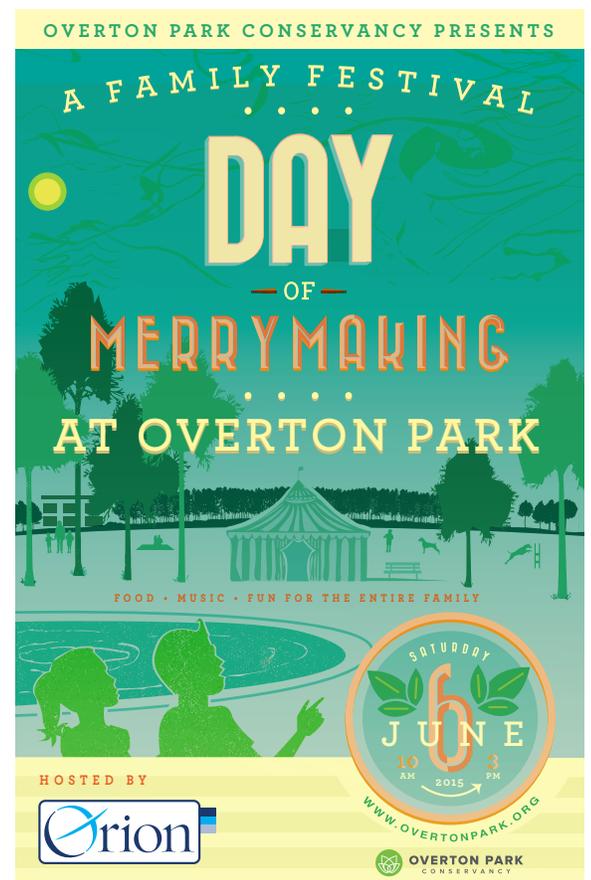
Food trucks include Say Cheese, Le’ Food Truck, Meekie’s Munchies, and Kona Ice. Local vendors include Gurleygurl Design, Lexie Shaunel Illustration, and Glitter Tattoos.

Memphis Parkour will be giving demonstrations of their kinetic arts near Rainbow Lake, and the Bluff City Kings rugby team will do a rugby demo. Kids can ascend a climbing wall or play badminton, horseshoes, and cornhole. Students from Rhodes College will lead a scavenger hunt in the Old Forest.

A Day of Merrymaking is from 10:00a.m. to 3:00p.m. on the park’s Greensward. The festival is free, but a \$5 donation to Overton Park Conservancy is much appreciated!

This year’s festival is presented by Orion Federal Credit Union, with additional sponsorship by BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Hollywood Feed, Huey’s Restaurants, Hyde Family Foundations, Peddler Bike Shop, and The West Clinic.*

* as of March 30, 2015



Visit www.overtonpark.org/merrymaking for up-to-the-minute lists of entertainment, vendors, and schedules. If you’d like to become a sponsor or vendor at the event, you’ll find all the information you need there!

When is a match in the forest a good thing?

When it's part of ioby's matching gift campaign--this week only!

Raise your hand if you've ever gotten a little lost while walking in the Old Forest.

Or if you've wondered what the significance of the "Gnome Home" at trail marker 13 was.

Or if you've run several loops of the limestone trail and wanted to know how far you've traveled.

A new Overton Park Conservancy project will make navigating the park's trails easier and more informative. But we'll need your help...fast!

This week only, fundraising to improve our trail markers will get a big assist from the crowdfunding platform ioby (or "in our backyard"), which is offering \$85,000 in matching funds to bring projects to life all over Memphis. Today through Wednesday, April 15, you can double your gift to our project by donating through ioby's website.

Our project goals are simple:

- Add six mile markers along the 1.4-mile limestone trail.
- Replace the worn and missing trail markers on the Old Forest Trail.
- Update the interpretive map of the Old Forest Trail that was created by Park Friends in the 1980s, pointing out key features of the forest.
- Add this interpretive content to our website so that it can be refreshed as needed.

For the first phase of this project, we'll be concentrating on the Old Forest Trail, replacing the current markers with similarly natural-looking posts. This loop trail is representative of the forest as a whole, with skyscraping trees, birds and butterflies flitting through vines, and a carpet of incredible native wildflowers every spring. The current trail markers



Worn and missing markers on the Old Forest Trail will be replaced. When you donate to this effort, ioby will match your gift.

are about 30 years old, and the ones that have survived are either broken, worn, or covered in graffiti. It's time for a facelift.

New mile markers on the limestone trail would follow a similar naturally-inspired template. Runners will finally be able to track their distance on the limestone trail.

We'll also be developing a new interpretive map that corresponds to the trail markers. It will be available online as both an interactive map and

a printable document. The new map will call attention to particularly notable tree specimens, features like WPA bridges, and ecological phenomena like how soil is made.

Eventually, we would like to add markers to other trails in the forest, creating a unified, easy-to-navigate trail system. As we implement our Natural Area Management Plan with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, we'll be paying close attention to trail maintenance and navigation.

It's all part of our larger effort to make visitors to the Old Forest feel welcome, safe, and well-informed. Our new entrance gateways will lead you into the forest, and well-marked trails will allow you to immerse yourself in nature. Help us kickstart this effort by making a gift of any amount today.



Scan this QR code on your mobile device, or visit <https://www.ioby.org/project/new-trail-markers-overton-parks-old-forest> to donate.

The first \$150 of every gift up to \$1,750 will be matched by ioby, so your \$50 gift becomes \$100! But hurry: the match campaign ends this week, so the deadline to give is **Wednesday, April 15.**



Rhodes students find a forest of treasures



Taylor Sieben records GPS coordinates of a large tree that has fallen along the Red Trail. It's part of a down woody debris survey to determine the rate at which canopy trees are falling.

You could visit the Old Forest every day of your life and never come close to unlocking all its secrets. It's an ecosystem that has been living far longer than any of us have, surviving through countless impacts both human and natural. It's hard not to wonder what it might have looked like several decades ago, if not hundreds of years ago.

But the greater concern is what the forest will look like several decades from *now*. And that's where the Rhodes College Midtown Urban Forestry Fellowship program comes in.

Under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Kasper at Rhodes and Eric Bridges at Overton Park Conservancy, Catherine Miller, Alex Noel, and Taylor Sieben visit plots in the Old Forest several times per week to collect data about:

- GPS locations, height, diameter, and growth rates of the large old "remnant" trees
- Locations of canopy gaps left when large trees fall, and regeneration rates of new trees there
- Species, locations, and extent of harmful invasive plants
- Amounts of each plant species
- Evidence of insects and disease in plants

This information can then be analyzed alongside previous studies of the Old Forest's plant composition. This helps us determine how the plants are relating to each other, and whether those relationships are different now than they were 5, 10, or 50 years

ago. Ultimately, we want to try to determine what is disrupting those relationships—for example, why today's oak saplings are not reaching maturity, even though there are many large, older oaks in the canopy.

For the students, their work in the Old Forest is an opportunity to understand and care for the urban trees that give Memphis its unique character. Miller says it's a window into the past that she never expected. "You can tell a lot about the forest's age by looking at trees. A lot of people just see the trees for their beauty, but the canopy actually tells you a lot about the park's history." She inspected a large fallen tree, estimating its age at about 120 years. "We used to look at tree rings in grade school, but I never imagined how much specific knowledge you could get from them."

The students' work is important in helping Overton Park Conservancy determine the best management strategy for the Old Forest. As they create a snapshot of how the forest is composed in 2015, they help us plan for managing forest health well into the future. And students will continue to be a part of the process, as the Conservancy and Rhodes plan to continue the fellowship after the first year concludes in May.

"This forest is so remarkable and under so much pressure from invasives and heavy use," says Eric Bridges. "It's also small and fragmented, which makes it less resilient to these pressures. That's why it's important that we study it well and manage it carefully. This Urban Forestry Fellowship is just the beginning of that process."



Visit www.overtonpark.org/oldforest to learn more about the work happening in the woods.



Rhodes fellows Alex Noel and Catherine Miller work with Conservancy Director of Operations Eric Bridges to determine the species of a vine.

Meet our new Director of Development

In January, Overton Park Conservancy welcomed our first Director of Development to the staff. Susannah Barton came to us from Buffalo, New York, where she served as Executive Director of Grassroots Gardens, a nonprofit that strengthens neighborhoods through community gardens.

In her new role, Susannah is working to increase our level of public support. She focuses on conveying the message of what it takes to operate the park at a high level. We asked her a few questions about what excites her about working on behalf of the park.

What made working at Overton Park appealing?

I was excited to join the Conservancy team because it's the perfect opportunity to put my non-profit leadership experience and my urban planning background to work here in Memphis. It affords me the opportunity to engage with the community, as well as public and private partners, to promote and support this great regional asset. Plus, who wouldn't want to come to work in Overton Park every day?

What led you to a career in conservation?

I believe when we think about our cities, it is important to think about access--in particular, access to green space. We not only have a thriving urban park, but we also have 126 acres of forest, preserved for generations to experience. This is an incredibly unique asset that provides endless opportunities for education to all of our community members.

On any given day in Overton Park, you see families gathering at picnic tables, children playing, friends relaxing, people exercising, and kids experiencing nature. This is what makes a community strong, what makes a place great.

Why did you choose to move to Memphis?

I've loved the city since 1993 when I tagged along with my sister to a college visit at Rhodes. It's been a love affair with Memphis ever since. My husband and I love to travel and meet new people, but we always knew we would land closer to home and family.



We're lucky to have the world's coolest niece and nephew, and it was important to be a regular part of their lives. We chose family, which is why we chose Memphis.

The city is attractive for many reasons--affordability, ease of living, and access to green space. My favorite thing about Memphis is that it's a real city with real challenges, real opportunities, and real

people. It took me 20 years to get here, but I couldn't be happier to call myself a Memphian.

What's the one thing you want people to know about the Conservancy?

The Conservancy exists to maintain and enhance this incomparable civic asset, to build off of the legacy of conservation of those before us, and to preserve this precious park for all Memphians. I hope people know we are stewards of this public land on their behalf, and all our efforts are driven by the desire to provide the public with a safe, welcoming, and vibrant park.

How can people support Overton Park?

People can support Overton Park in many ways. I want people to know that we are just as grateful for the \$5 gift as we are for the \$500 gift. And if you're not in a position to give financially, we have several ways for you to give your time. We are all stewards of Overton Park, and we have a responsibility to the generations after us to preserve and enhance this great place. Whether you decide to volunteer, become a member, sponsor our family festival, or honor a loved one or pet with a memorial gift, I encourage everyone to think about how you can support your park.

What's your favorite part of Overton Park?

My favorite part of Overton Park is the East Parkway playground and picnic area. It is just such a beautiful spot. I love that you can enjoy a picnic, kids can play on the playground or read along the Storywalk, while others enjoy a pick-up game of football, all under the canopy of such amazing trees. To me the East Parkway picnic area is a perfect reflection of one of Memphis' best features -- our trees.

Overton Park is everything...but only with your help

Ask any visitor what Overton Park means to them, and you may get a unique answer every time. For some, the park represents a life-changing moment, like meeting a future spouse or a lifelong friend. For others, it's a place of childhood memories--trips to the zoo, adventures in the forest, afternoons on the playground. For many, the park is an everyday escape, a place that's always there to welcome them.

But great parks don't just happen; they're made, from the commitment of the people who love them. Those people plant the trees, maintain the facilities, fix what's broken, and dream big about the future. To take care of our park for generations to come, Overton Park Conservancy relies on you.

Luckily, supporting the park is easy! Here are two great ways to do it.

Become a Team Overton Park Volunteer

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty, there's a great fit for you at Overton Park. Our Team Overton Park volunteer program gives you four ways to help:

- **Park monitoring:** visit the park and report maintenance needs or interesting observations to the Conservancy
- **Volunteer work days:** join a Conservancy activity such as repairing the limestone trail or planting flowers
- **Special events:** assist with our family festival
- **Organizational events:** we work with your business to create a project that benefits both the park and your employees

Visit www.overtonpark.org/volunteer for all the details.

volunteer calendar

See all opportunities and RSVP at www.overtonpark.org/volunteerdays.

April 11 - Hollywood Feed at Overton Bark

April 18 - Volunteer Appreciation Picnic at East Parkway

May 9 - Hollywood Feed at Overton Bark

May 16 - Volunteer Work Day at Overton Bark

June 5 - A Day of Merrymaking (setup)



Volunteers planted trees near the East Parkway Playground in March.

Become a Park Member

Membership is an annual way to help with the cost of operating the park. As we complete projects like Overton Bark and Rainbow Lake Playground, maintenance needs arise--like refreshing safety surfacing, repairing leaky water fountains, and replacing broken swingsets. Plus, many day-to-day costs never go away, like emptying trash cans, maintaining landscaping, and cleaning and stocking restrooms. Because the park has no admission fee, we rely on our members to help with these costs.

There's a little something in it for you, of course... besides a beautiful park! With our new Member Perks program, all members will receive discounts to local businesses like Lenny's, The Attic, Breakaway Running, and The Booksellers at Laurelwood just for showing your membership card. It's a great way to shop and dine local while also supporting the park.

June 6 - A Day of Merrymaking Family Festival

July 11 - Hollywood Feed at Overton Bark

August 8 - Hollywood Feed at Overton Bark

August 15 - Volunteer Work Day at Rainbow Lake

October 10 - Hollywood Feed at Overton Bark

November 7 - Volunteer Work Day at Veterans Plaza

Members at the Individual level and up also receive a beautiful t-shirt that captures the many things that make the park special. From Bike Gate to the Levitt Shell to the Doughboy, whatever you love about the park is here.

Join at any of these levels:

Basic Member (\$25): Member Perks discounts, admission to park tours, and Overton Park decal

Individual Member (\$50): Basic level benefits, plus one 2015 Overton Park t-shirt (add a second for \$25)

Partner (\$100): Basic level benefits, plus two t-shirts and a set of Overton Park postcards

Patron (\$250): Partner level benefits, plus a one-time 25% discount on facility rental at the park, and Willy Bearden's book *Images of America: Overton Park*

Sustaining Member (\$500): Partner level benefits, plus an exclusive hand-drawn map of Overton Park

Organizational Member (\$200): Four Overton Park t-shirts and four decals

Seniors and students receive a \$10 discount. Children's t-shirts can be added for \$10 each, and Overton Park bandanas can be added for \$5 each.



Visit www.overtonpark.org/membership or return the envelope enclosed in this newsletter.



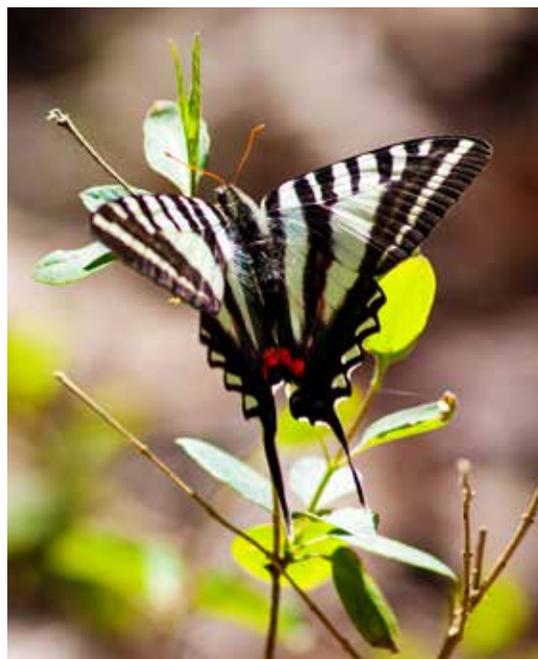
This year's members-only t-shirt, designed by Taropop, features all the things that make Overton Park great.

Celebrate with us during Natural Areas Week

Each spring, the Tennessee Division of Natural Areas, our partner in managing the Old Forest, hosts a weeklong Natural Areas Celebration in the state's 82 designated natural areas. The public has the opportunity to take free tours led by state and local experts in the flora and fauna of each location.

We're thrilled that the Old Forest will be hosting tours this year. It's an excellent opportunity to appreciate the unique way the forest transforms in spring, when it hosts insects and birds that only appear for a small window of time.

We'll have two tours on **Sunday, April 19**, and each will last approximately 45 minutes. Both walks meet at East Parkway Pavilion and repeat immediately, so if you'd like to take the butterfly tour at 10:00a.m., you can then take the bird tour at 11:00a.m.



Zebra swallowtails are common in spring.

Butterflies and Plants

Leader: Bart Jones, Naturalist

Come enjoy the wildflowers and butterflies, as you learn about the native plants these tiny creatures depend on for food and shelter.

Birds of the Old Forest

Leader: Margaret Jefferson, member, Tennessee Ornithological Society

Spring is a great time for seeing and hearing birds in the forest. We should see birds that live here all year, birds that migrate on the way to northern nesting sites, and those that migrate here to nest. Please bring a pair of binoculars and a field guide if you have one.



Please **RSVP by April 18** to 901-214-5450 or mmcmasters@overtonpark.org.

Overton Park Conservancy gratefully acknowledges the individuals and organizations who made gifts, pledges, and in-kind donations between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014. If we have inadvertently omitted the name of one of our supporters, we sincerely apologize.

\$100,000 - \$499,999

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\$10,000 - \$99,999

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...that Overton Park will be featured in an upcoming PBS special?

PBS' "Ten That Changed America" series has covered buildings that influenced our country's architectural history. The next special in the series will be "Ten Parks That Changed America," and Overton Park will be the subject of a segment. The focus will be on how Citizens to Preserve Overton Park's activism against the proposed extension of I-40 helped public lands fight against the encroachment of development. Filming is set for this spring.

...that *The New York Times* thinks Overton Park is a great place to relax?

In the January 14 edition of the *Times*' popular "36 Hours" series, Overton Park was suggested as the finale for a whirlwind weekend in Memphis. Writer Colleen Creamer suggests, "Wrap it up at one of the city's great outdoor spaces: Overton Park, a 342-acre green space that includes the Brooks Museum, the Levitt Shell, the Memphis Zoo and other attractions. Stroll through one of the park's most extraordinary spaces, the 126-acre Old Forest State Natural Area, on the National Register of Historic Places (it's over 10,000 years old), having never been tilled or farmed — rare for any space, urban or otherwise. In the spring, the forest floor is covered with bright yellow wood poppy, and even winter affords a close-up look at flocks of golden-crowned kinglets, tiny gymnastic songbirds."