

TRAILBLAZER

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council

Supporting Oregon Ridge Nature Center since 1982

Spring 2024
Special Issue

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Contributors to this issue: Judy Breitenbach, Ralph Brown,
Michael Eversmier, Meghan Feldman, Alan Penczek

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Cover Photo by Michael Eversmier

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Ralph Brown, M.D., President, Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council

Although Blue Cross is still refusing to pay my gas mileage for trips to Oregon Ridge, the science is clear. We're past the point of debate—being in nature improves one's health. Time spent walking in the woods, observing birds, working in the garden, sitting by a stream, all lower blood pressure, increase immunological capacity, lower blood stress hormones, and improve mood.

As the soaring attendance at the park proved, Oregon Ridge helped many residents of Baltimore County get through the covid years. These facts are as certain as that our globe is warming, our bird and insect populations are crashing and our hardwood forests are dying. Fortunately for Oregon Ridge, a significant number of our Council members not only acknowledge these concerns but want to do something about them. By volunteering to work with the park staff on the many nature-centered activities and educational experiences that Oregon Ridge offers, or helping with the many necessary maintenance chores, or agreeing to be on the board of the nature center council, you keep the park functioning at a commendable level.

Bob Smith, the Director of the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks, often mentions that on a per capita basis, the average Recreation and Parks Department across the country is funded by their government at SIX TIMES more than his Baltimore County department. When I visit nature centers and parks in other jurisdictions, I don't come away

feeling that I have had a much richer experience than one gets at Oregon Ridge. Although some nature centers might have their own taxidermy cold storage room, I leave feeling proud of what we offer at Oregon Ridge. Why is that possible? This issue of the newsletter (produced by our volunteers) gives you the answer.

Most people who visit Oregon Ridge have no idea what the County does for the park and what the Council provides for the park. Even the Department of Recreation and Parks is at times unaware of what the Council does. Those of you who are members of Oregon Ridge often don't realize that you are all members of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council. The Council is the nonprofit friends group of the park. It is through the fund raising and volunteer activities of the Council that Oregon Ridge is able to close the other 5/6ths of the gap with neighboring counties. Since its inception, the park has been protected and enhanced by the dreams of the Council and its nature loving members. We recognize that anything that degrades the environment shortens the path to a more impoverished world. I hope you will take a few moments to appreciate all that the Council does.

As spring approaches, I invite you to come to Oregon Ridge to enjoy the spring ephemeral plants and the songs of birds and chorus frogs, eager to produce their next generation. A visit is guaranteed to lower your blood pressure and might even tempt you into taking a more active role in the park's future.

TROUT IN THE CLASSROOM

by Michael Eversmier, ORNC Naturalist

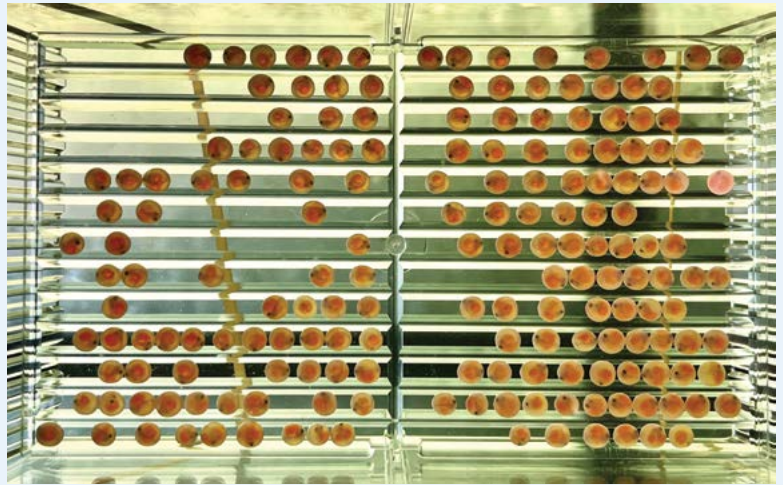
On the southwest side of Oregon Ridge Park, cold water seeps from the ground under a canopy of trees creating a brook with waters cold, clean, and pristine enough to support a small population of very temperature-sensitive trout. Native brook trout, aka brookies, to be more precise. Streams like this are becoming rarer in Baltimore County, yet their importance should not be underestimated.

Back at the nature center, a rainbow trout exhibit allows the staff to educate visitors about cold water streams like the one in our park through a program entitled, "Trout In The Classroom." TIC has been around for three decades in classrooms across the country educating 100,000+ students annually. Luckily the local sponsors, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and The Maryland Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) have provided ORNC with a special cold water tank setup so we can share a trout's picky life cycle with the general public.

The program begins in early December each year when approximately 170 eggs are delivered by a TU volunteer to the nature center. They are placed in a small clear breeding box inside our 58° temperature-regulated tank for all to see. For the first week, the eggs develop with two tiny eyes visible inside their transparent case.

A week later, the eggs begin to hatch with approximately 90% making it to their next stage of life as alevins. For the next 3 weeks, the alevins will wiggle around on the bottom of the breeding box while absorbing food from their yolk sacs. The same as they would in the wild, hiding from predators in the clean gravel of a stream bed.

Their next big challenge of their lifecycle will be to swim to the surface and gulp in a tiny breath of air to inflate their swim bladder. Thereby allowing them to suspend in the water column and begin feeding. At this stage, the young trout are about 3 centimeters long and referred to as fry. The fry are fed 3 times a day on food we provide and increases in size as they grow.



Trout eggs



Alevin closeup with yolk sac

Article continues on page 9

MAPLE SUGARING - A Community Affair

by Judy Breitenbach, Maryland Master Naturalist



Maple Sugaring weekends are a late winter event at Oregon Ridge Nature Center. With the support of our many volunteers and Nature Center Staff the event went off without a hitch once again this year despite a start delay because of snow on the first day. A large number of participants visited the park to learn about the history of maple sugaring in North America.

Oregon Ridge Park has a number of Sugar Maple and Black Walnut trees that are large enough to tap. The tree sap is collected as it starts to run as the temperature rises during the day and drops below freezing at night. Sugar maples have a light gray, flaky bark with black patches near the base. Its leaves are located opposite one another on opposing branches. The black walnut tree has long, deeply ridged, dark bark. Its compound leaves are pinnate shape with an alternating branch arrangement.

Staff and volunteers lead visitors on a 40-minute hike into wooded areas where they demonstrated how trees were tapped with a hand-cranked drill. A spile used as a spout was inserted into the tree and a bucket was hung to collect the sap. Upon return from the hike, visitors could try making their own spile from sumac branches. The Staghorn Sumac tree is available in the park. The stems are densely covered in rust-colored hairs with a velvety texture. The pith is soft and can be easily removed to make a hollow tube to fashion into a spile to use for tapping. It is believed that this is one way Native Americans used to catch the sap to make maple sugar. The sumac berries were also used for medicinal purposes. Today, you can find sumac in the spice section of your local market. It has a fruity, citrusy flavor.

Throughout the day demonstrations provided visitors with the historical timeline of maple sugaring starting with how Native Americans used hot rocks to evaporate the water from the tree sap until it became sugar. Boiling the sap in hollowed out logs was a long, tedious process that yielded small amounts of valuable product. The sugar could be saved in small pouches to be used as nourishment on long days of hunting. When the colonist came to America they brought iron kettles with them and developed what is known as the three-kettle system of making maple sugar/syrup. The sap was poured into the largest kettle first and boiled over a fire. As the water evaporated the sap was poured into the middle-sized kettle. Finally, the sap was poured into the smallest kettle and boiled until it became the consistency of syrup or sugar. The first backyard evaporator was patented in 1884. Visitors were able to see sap that was actually collected from Oregon Ridge trees this year undergo the boiling process. In the sugar shack volunteers demonstrated how a commercial sized evaporator worked. Once touring was complete visitors saw how snow maple candy was made and enjoyed a small tasting of it. They were also able to taste some maple sugar and syrup.



The day was not complete before visitors stopped by the Nature Center to view a film on operations of a modern day maple syrup farm. They also tasted pancakes with maple syrup and house made maple sugar cotton candy.

OREGON RIDGE TENANT HOUSE - Living History

by Alan Penczek, Tenant House Volunteer Docent



Don't try scratching your back with this 19th century household item.

Hint: This is not for lifting wood or ice. What is this?

You can find the answer on page 8!

Please contact the Oregon Ridge Nature Center at 410-887-1815 during regular business hours — Tuesday thru Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. to inquire about when the docent-staffed Tenant House will be open. Outside of regular business hours inquire via email to info@OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org.

All photos for this article courtesy of Alan Penczek

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council Scholarship

2024 is the 29th consecutive year that the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council has awarded scholarships to high school seniors from Baltimore City and Baltimore County who have demonstrated a commitment to the environment, and are planning a college major in environmental science or nature education. **A total of \$30,000 was awarded for the school year 2023-2024.**

We hope you will consider giving generously to the Scholarship Fund to help support these deserving students:
<https://www.oregonridgenaturecenter.org/scholarships/>



ANNUAL PANCAKE BREAKFAST

March 2nd and 3rd 2024 at the Oregon Ridge Lodge

One event that has become a family and community tradition is the annual Pancake Breakfast held shortly after the Maple Sugaring Weekends.

At the end of the Sugar Season these hearty breakfast feasts draw hundreds of hungry people: a menu of Pancakes with 100% maple syrup, sausage – all fresh from the grill, along with orange juice, coffee, tea or milk. YUM!



Guests enjoy Live Music, a box and quarter raffle, Plant Sale, Face Painting, along with sales of fresh maple syrup from our maple trees, maple candy, maple cotton candy, honey, and Nature Books.



Mayo Family Band, with Amy Hopkins



Oregon Ridge Tenant House: A Living History, continued from page 6.



Answer: This is a Handheld Kettle Hook.

When handles were made of metal, this allowed the homemaker to lift hot pots or kettles off the stove without getting burned.

For very large or heavy pots, two people could work together by using two hooks, one on each side.

Note the metal iron also being heated on the stove, for ironing clothes.

OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING **June 4th 5:30pm Lake Pavilion**



Join us at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council's Annual Meeting for an evening of celebration and planning.

Enjoy complimentary refreshments as we honor our dedicated staff and volunteers; celebrate our scholarship winners; and share our updates and plans for the year ahead!

All are Welcome!

TRAILBLAZER STAFF

Council President: Ralph Brown
Council Vice President: Winny Tan
Nature Center Director: Jessica Jeannetta

Nature Center Administrative Assistant: Kathy Kadow
Editor: Pat Clagett
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Trout in the Classroom continued:



Coloration in young rainbow trout

By April, approximately 85% of our original delivery have survived and grown 5 to 10 cm long and are now referred to as fingerlings. By May, the TIC schools will begin releasing all their trout before school lets out for summer vacation. The nature center will also release most of our quickly growing trout to make room for a dozen that will live in the nature center through the Fall and grow to a near-adult size of 15 to 25 centimeters by the end of their first year.

In the wild, the survival rate for fish reaching one year old can be as low as only 10% as wild fish face natural and man-made factors like predation, diseases, pollution, and habitat degradation. In November, some trout from our tank will be loaned to nearby schools so they can start up the biological cycle in their tanks which have been dry since May. Finally, around Thanksgiving, all the remaining trout are collected, tagged, and released so the process can start over again.

During the program, students, visitors, volunteers, interns, and staff learn about the fish's life cycle, how to take water quality readings, track survival rates and how to keep the fish healthy. Various species of trout are used for the TIC program around the country. In Maryland, we are supplied with rainbow trout which are actually native to the US west coast. Rainbows are easier for students to raise and can tolerate slightly warmer water conditions in the wild than in our state's very sensitive native brook trout. Released trout are placed only in designated "Put and Take" streams which are annually stocked with rainbow trout by the MD Department of Natural Resources. Oregon Ridge's TIC trout are not released in our park but are specifically permitted for release in the "Put and Take" section of the Little Gunpowder Falls.

So the next time you are hiking the yellow trail in the park, take note of the small stream you cross near Ivy Hill Pond. This special cold water stream is named Baisman Run. Its pristine waters not only support our park's native brook trout but also it also finds its way into Loch Raven reservoir which supplies water to another picky species who also prefers their drinking water to be pristine too!

All photos for this article courtesy of Michael Eversmier

MOONRISE ON A CLOUDY NIGHT

by Meghan Feldman

We set out from the Lake Pavilion at Oregon Ridge Nature Center a little after 6:30pm on September 29, 2023. The twenty or so of us trailed in a haphazard line behind Michael Eversmier, the naturalist leading the evening's activities. The plan was to catch sunset and moonrise at the park's Solar Observatory – 6:52 and 7:11pm, respectively – before looping through the woods on the Baltimore Gneiss trail and ending back at the Lake Pavilion for s'mores. As we tromped down the gravel road toward the Community Garden, everyone's phones remained in their pockets. We snuck glances at the sky. Clouds rolled overhead and spat raindrops as if trying to scare us off. But we had signed up for the Harvest Full Moon Hike, and we weren't about to be deterred. Michael assured us that there were still patches of clear sky around us, that there was still hope to watch the sun set and the moon rise.

A supermoon would grace the skies that evening. Like that of all celestial bodies, the moon's orbit traces out an ellipse – an egglike shape, with the Earth nestled in as the yolk. A full moon that occurs while the moon is closest to the Earth, where the Moon travels along the shallow curve at the bottom of its egg-shaped orbit, is called a supermoon. The next supermoon wouldn't be until August 2024 and I didn't want to wait eleven months for another chance to see it.

That night's supermoon was also the Harvest moon – the name given to the full moon that rises closest to the autumn equinox. Because the Earth orbits the Sun with a 23.5-degree cant to its axis, for half of the year the northern hemisphere tilts toward the sun, and for the other half of the year, the southern hemisphere tilts toward the sun. The two days when the sun's



Photo by Michael Eversmier

light hits the equator directly when crossing from one hemisphere to the other are called the equinoxes. The autumn equinox marks the transition from summer to fall. Cloaked in the deepening twilight, we neared the Community Garden, and a bite in the air whispered of autumn's approach.

By 6:40pm we had approached the Solar Observatory, a section of meadow with north-south and east-west aisles mown through the wildflowers and overgrowth. Michael conceived of this installation several years ago and worked with fellow Oregon Ridge naturalist Will Dalrymele to bring it to life. Following Michael's lead, we crowded into the central clearing where he deftly oriented us in the landscape. A stake driven into the ground marked north, pointing to the star Polaris. The Earth's rotational axis aligns with Polaris like a bead on a string, giving the star the name the North Star. Other stakes around us marked south, east, and west.

We searched for a break in the clouds overhead, hoping for the glint of a golden sunset or a flash of the full-moon's silver.

Only a few minutes to go, and clouds muddled the sky.

Waiting for the sun to set and the moon to rise and the clouds to clear is somewhat of a human tradition. People have been studying the night sky for tens of thousands of years, as evidenced by sites such as Stonehenge in England and the Chankillo Archaeoastronomical Complex in Peru. This allowed them to predict the seasons and the equinoxes, especially important for tracking optimal planting and harvesting times. The importance of solar observatories for agriculture was one reason why Michael proposed to have the Solar Observatory located next to the Community Garden.

The clock ticked past 6:52pm, 7:11pm... Then finally the sun set in the west and the Harvest supermoon rose in the east--but none of us saw it. No sudden gust of crisp air signaled fall's invisible arrival.

We continued our hike, following the winding path into the woods. Flashlights dappled pools of light across the trail. Kids crunched glow sticks, and flickers of rainbow colors painted the night. We reached the top of a treeless hill with an open view of the sky, where Michael explained that he brings groups here to stargaze, but when the weather doesn't cooperate, there's not much to see.

A few people brought out their phones. They pointed them at the sky.

In the thousands of years that humans have observed the night sky, our sky-charting and star-tracking technologies have advanced to the point where clouds no longer prevent us from watching the moon and the stars.

Sources:

Harvest Full Moon Hike at Oregon Ridge Park, led by Michael Eversmier, 9/29/2023
<https://science.nasa.gov/earth/moon/what-is-a-supermoon/>
<https://moon.nasa.gov/moon-in-motion/phases-eclipses-supermoons/supermoons/>
<http://astropixels.com/ephemeris/moon/fullperigee2001.html>
<https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/4-full-supermoons-in-a-row-2023/>

I pulled out my phone as well and held it up to the sky as the pixelated sweep of the Milky Way spilled overhead. As I moved my phone toward the east, I found the Harvest supermoon on my screen, a little silver pearl.

People spun around with their phones, as the constellations, stars, and planets were revealed from behind the clouds. One woman pointed her phone straight down, peering through the Earth. "Hubble space telescope is right there!" she said with a laugh.

Our relationship with the night sky has changed over the thousands of years that humans have been trying to uncover its patterns and secrets. We see the same stars and planets that our ancestors watched, and the same Harvest Moon signals the start of autumn. But without solar observatories such as Oregon Ridge Park, it's easy to forget that we live in the same world of solstices and equinoxes as our ancestors. Experiencing these ancient traditions--stargazing, watching the supermoon rise, tracking the rising and setting of the sun--connect us to the natural world in a different way than our apps do.

A cloudy night may have stopped us from seeing the Harvest supermoon rise, but there will be supermoons and Harvest moons and equinoxes next year.

The cycle continues, and the seasons roll on as ever.

Meghan Feldman is a student in the John Hopkins University's Master Science Writing Program.

What is the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council?

Who we are...

- The Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council (ORNCC) is the nonprofit friends group that supports Oregon Ridge.
- We are 800+ members strong!
- We are families, hikers, birders, gardeners, volunteers, naturalists, advocates and all manner of friends of the park... **We love Oregon Ridge!**

What we do...

- The Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council funds and supports many fun and educational activities and programs at the Park, for members and the general public.
- The Council hosts community traditions, like the annual Pancake Breakfast and Honey Harvest.
- We raise funds to support Oregon Ridge Nature Center activities and facilities, including exhibits and equipment.
- We help build awareness of our ecosystems and the Park's history.
- We champion initiatives to preserve and enhance the park's natural beauty, trails and wildlife.
- We help engage volunteers to support nature-based learning and recreation at the park.
- We operate the ORNC website (<https://www.oregonridgenaturecenter.org/>) and publish our quarterly newsletter, the Trailblazer.
- We speak up for the park and everyone who loves it.



What we stand for...

The Oregon Ridge Nature Center's mission is to provide engaging educational and recreational opportunities in nature that will instill a sense of wonder, promote environmental stewardship and create a lasting legacy of a protected deciduous forest in our own backyard and in Maryland.



Current and future challenges, opportunities and priorities...

- Creating a large-scale woodland garden to showcase native plants of the Piedmont forest.
- Securing funding for a new nature play space.
- Supporting the implementation of the Oregon Ridge Park Master Plan with the focus on restoring and protecting the park's natural environment and enhancing nature-based recreational and learning opportunities.
- Advocating for investment in a healthier and more resilient forest and the addition of a park natural resources manager.
- Repairing and upgrading our 6-mile network of trails that leads through forest, field and stream habitats.
- Repairing foot bridges over stream crossings.
- Removing invasive plants.
- Continuing fun traditions!

All the good things we do together...

Learning New Things

- School Field Trips
- Nature Buds - explore a different nature theme each week
- Stewardship Work Days
- Speaker Series - informative and engaging talks on a wide range of nature-related topics
-and much, much more*

Annual Events & Festivals

- Spring/Summer – Music in the Woods
- Fall - Honey Harvest Festival
- Winter - Maple Sugaring weekends, Pancake Breakfast

Exploring Nature

- Pictures in the Park
- Nurture with Nature
- Nature Book Club
- Seed Library
-learn more*

Community Events

- Summer Camp
- Homeschool Nature Days
- Bookworm Story Time
- Native Plant Swap
- Astronomy in the Park
- Trail Guide Training
- Oregon Ridge Dulcimers
- ... and so much more*

**Please note that programs require advance registration unless otherwise noted. Some programs are open to Council members first and they can fill up fast!*



For Up-To-Date information about all our programs and events, please visit

<https://oregonridgenaturecenter.wildapricot.org/>



What it means to be a volunteer...

Polly Roberts

I have been a volunteer with the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council for more than 25 years, serving on its Scholarship Committee. Annually, the Council awards scholarships to deserving high school seniors from Baltimore City and County who are planning an environmental major in college and an eventual career in an environmental field. During my time on the Committee, over \$212,000 has been awarded to 85 students!

My most rewarding experience has been the privilege of interviewing the scholarship applicants - I have found these young people to be incredible! They are among the “best and brightest”: committed, passionate, and single-mindedly focused on solving our major environmental problems. With them as stewards of the earth, they give me HOPE for the future!

Mary Genovese

I started volunteering at Oregon Ridge as a teenager in 2008 as part of the Ridge Runner program. I have always had a love for nature and wildlife so I looked forward to working with the nature center’s animal ambassadors every week and learning everything I could about them. I enjoyed my volunteer work at Oregon Ridge so much that I decided to return in 2015 while attending college and applied to be a part-time naturalist. As a biology major, I wanted to gain as much work experience as I could in my chosen field.

My work as a naturalist not only expanded my knowledge of local wildlife, but it also pulled me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to gain experience working with the public. Oregon Ridge Park, like other local parks in Baltimore County, is an important resource in our community. This park provides children and families with the tools they need to learn about and understand the importance of the natural environment. I recommend volunteering at Oregon Ridge Park to anyone! It is such a rewarding experience.

Jim Curtis

In 2006, having recently retired, I decided to look for some meaningful volunteer work. I grew up in Cockeysville so I was familiar with Oregon Ridge Park as a hiker, but I wasn’t familiar with the Nature Center. Upon visiting the Nature Center I soon learned of an upcoming class for volunteer Trail Guides.

Shortly after completing the class I began as a trail guide and joined the Trail Guide group at the Park. It was very rewarding to take excited school-age children on hikes and to experience their enthusiasm and their appreciation for nature. As a side benefit to being part of the trail guide group I joined the monthly outings held by the Trail Guides. On the outings to other nature centers and natural areas I got to know and befriend the other trail guides.

After a year or two I learned how the Nature Center was supported by the Nature Center Council. Consequently, I joined the Council and shortly thereafter I was invited to join the Executive Board.

Over the past 18 years I’ve continued my work at Oregon Ridge. The work has been rewarding, new friends made, children and adults educated, and I’ve found myself at home in a Park that I have utilized since my childhood.

Jim is a former Vice-President (2009) and President (2010-2013) of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council (ORNCC) Executive Board. Jim is responsible for creating the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, Inc. as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation in 2012. Jim also created the original ORNC website, and developed our FaceBook page. He continues to support the Park in many capacities and currently serves as chair of the Council Board’s Environment Committee.



Find out more about volunteering!

Just Some of the Good Things We Do Together...

Protect

- Active in developing Oregon Ridge Park's Master Plan
- Successfully fight potentially harmful for-profit recreation concessions at the park.
- Hired the Trails Conservancy, Inc. to conduct a professional assessment of the Park's 6-mile network of trails.
- Successfully advocated for remediation of the meadow.
- Support and advocate for the protection and preservation of the park's many ecosystems and habitats.
- Promote and advocate for the interests of park visitors seeking nature-based recreation and learning.



Educate

- Fund scholarships for high school students pursuing environmental/forestry studies.
- Fund and publish the "Trailblazer" Newsletter.
- Sponsor our popular Speaker Series of informative and engaging talks on nature-related topics by leading specialists in the environmental sciences, natural history and related fields.
- Sponsor the ORNC Book Club which meets eight times a year to discuss varied topics about nature and the environment — for all who share an avid interest in the natural world.
- Fund the Park's interpretive signage and exhibits
- Enrichment Fund.

Restore

- Carried out citizen-initiated trail improvements.
- Installed citizen-initiated bridges.
- Attracted state funds for creating the new woodland garden.
- Attracted state funds for upgrades to our network of walking trails.

Enhance

- Raised private funds for the Kidd's Nature Pavilion.
- Raised private funds for Nature Center library renovation.
- Raising funds for the new Woodland Garden.
- Continue to build and install hand-crafted wooden benches throughout the Park.
- Train and support a new Stewardship team of Volunteers, currently working to remove invasive plants that damage native species.





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Many branches make a strong tree. Many members make a strong Council. Use this membership form to renew and give a copy to a friend.

Make checks payable to: ORNC Council, Inc., 13555 Beaver Dam Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030.

You can also join or renew online. Please visit:

www.OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org/Join-Donate-Volunteer/

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Stay in touch!

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For upcoming programs at ORNC, visit:
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Or scan the QR Code above

To make a donation to ORNC, visit:
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