

TRAILBLAZER

Friends of Oregon Ridge
Supporting Oregon Ridge Nature Center Since 1982
Summer 2026

In this issue:

- 2 - Director's Corner
- 3- President's Column
- 4 - Scholarships
- 6 - Program Calendar
- 8 - Living History
- 9 - Music in the Woods
- 10 - The Meadow Challenge
- 11 - Annual Meeting
- 12 - Annual Reports

GOING GREEN: In an effort to be more eco-friendly, the Trailblazer will be going digital-only beginning with the Winter edition. For current and past editions, CHECK OUT <https://www.friendsofOregonRidge.org/news-views/>



Contributors to this issue: Jill Kane, Winny Tan, Roscoe Possidente, Molly Dunham Glassman, Alan Penczek, and Martha Johnston.

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Director's Corner

Jill Kane, Director, Oregon Ridge Nature Center

Semi-Aquatic Mammals of Maryland

When most visitors picture the wildlife that inhabits Oregon Ridge Lake, they often think of the familiar daytime neighbors - turtles basking on sun-warmed logs, fish weaving through patches of aquatic vegetation, and frogs calling from the shoreline. Yet, as the sun dips below the tree line and the lake settles into twilight, an entirely different cast of characters emerges. During these quieter hours, the lake and similar habitats become lively arenas for several species of semi-aquatic mammals.

Among the mammals that frequent the lake and surrounding wetlands of Maryland are beavers, river otters, mink, and muskrats. Although many people assume the fisher belongs to this group, its name is misleading; fishers are primarily terrestrial and do not share the same aquatic habits as the others!

These semi-aquatic mammals share a suite of adaptations that allow them to thrive in both water and on land. Their fur is thick and water-resistant, providing insulation during colder months and enabling them to stay comfortable year-round. In the summer, they often rely on mud as a natural coolant. Their front paws are equipped with strong claws, tools that prove essential for capturing prey, digging through mud, searching for clams, and building nests or - in the case of beavers - entire dams and lodges. Their diets tend to center around the aquatic plants and animals available in their specific habitats, allowing each species to fill a distinct ecological niche.

Recent observations at Oregon Ridge have included **mink** hunting along the pond edges around dusk. Typically solitary, mink move with quick, fluid motions as they search for fish and other small prey.



American mink (*Neogale vison*)

River otters, on the other hand, are known for their impressive physical abilities. With a bite force measuring around 615 pounds, comparable to that of a black bear, river otters are formidable predators. Along with their strength, they are also opportunistic; they often make use of abandoned or newly vacated beaver lodges as convenient shelters for raising their young. River otters move in gendered packs known as "romps" when on land and "rafts" when in the water! Unlike their well-known oceanic cousins, river otters do not hold hands or have favorite rocks (both of which are often associated with sea otters).



North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*)

Beavers remain one of the most iconic and influential species in Maryland, but don't visit Oregon Ridge often, as our lake doesn't have as much incoming water as they prefer. These highly territorial creatures keep a watchful presence on their surroundings. Their signature warning, a sharp tail-slap on the water's surface, is designed to alert both animals and humans to keep their distance.



North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

Muskrats are not seen at Oregon Ridge as they are more commonly



common muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

found in southern Maryland. In those regions, muskrats play such a significant cultural role that entire festivals are dedicated to celebrating them!

Together, these mammals create a rich and dynamic nighttime world in our Maryland ecosystem, one that many folks never witness firsthand. Their presence offers a reminder that our lake remains active and alive long after dusk settles in, quietly supporting a complex and often overlooked community of wildlife.

President's Column

Winny Wong Tan, Friends of Oregon Ridge President

It has been one year since we introduced our new name—transitioning from the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, which had served the community since 1982, to the Friends of Oregon Ridge—and we unveiled our new logo. Over the past year, our organization has focused on strengthening our internal processes so we can continue to be strong advocates for Oregon Ridge for many years to come.

As the Council, our primary role was supporting staff in their shared vision for programming, events, and projects. As the Friends of Oregon Ridge, we remain committed to championing the Nature Center and park, but we are also growing as an independent, nonprofit organization by developing our own environmental programs and conservation initiatives that directly support our mission.

So, what is the Friends' mission?

Answering this question has taken time. This year has been about refining who we are, how we operate, and the impact we want to make. Over the last summer, the board came together to create a five-year strategic plan and worked on succession planning throughout this fiscal year. Because our organization has evolved over the past several years, we wanted our mission statement to truly reflect our current purpose and aspirations.

Our newly adopted mission statement is:

"The Friends of Oregon Ridge is dedicated to the protection of Oregon Ridge Nature Center and Park by engaging the public through education and stewardship, fostering connections with nature for generations."

This mission is our love letter to this remarkable 1,000-plus-acre park and to the thousands of people who visit each year—whether for summer nature camps, seasonal festivals, the Star-Spangled Spectacular at the Lodge, or simply to enjoy the beauty of nature.

In simpler terms, we often describe our work using four guiding words that emerged during our collaboration with Baltimore County on the Oregon Ridge Master Plan: **protect, restore, enhance, and educate.**

It has been a year of meaningful work. Our board is made up of dedicated and passionate volunteers. Because of their efforts, we have continued important programs such as our annual college scholarships and launched a new program: the Title I Field Trip Bus Scholarships. With the established program, we awarded \$46,500 this year to 11 students, who will receive the Friends of Oregon Ridge college scholarships. Our college scholarship committee was very impressed by the high school seniors' commitment to conservation and nature education. With the new program, our Title 1 Bus scholarship committee disbursed \$7,185.93 of the \$7,500 budgeted, serving 12 schools (8 county and 4 city) so they can take part in hands-on nature experiences without financial barriers.

We also continued progress on the Woodland Restoration Garden project by planting more than \$1,200 worth of native plants and

removing numerous invasive species. Board members became Weed Warrior certified, planted 19 hickory trees with other volunteers and ORNC staff, and participated in BCRP Listening Sessions to advocate for trail repairs and park maintenance. We are also hopeful that two new habitat exhibitions will be completed by the end of this upcoming year. In addition, our committees have made

valuable contributions to strengthening membership, communications, and programming.

This is a team that meets challenges with determination and makes all of these accomplishments possible. I would like to recognize the 2025-2026 Friends of Oregon Ridge Board: Roscoe, Gary, Karen, Brian, Cathy, Mike, Sindhu, Mark, Kathy, Don, Debbie, Diana, Donna, Martha, Michelle, and Judy, along with retired board members Elaine and Pat. Thank you all for everything you have done—and continue to do—to build a stronger organization and a brighter future for Oregon Ridge.

We look forward to many great projects with Oregon Ridge staff, Baltimore County Recreation and Parks, and the community.

Winny Wong Tan,
2025-2026 President, Friends of Oregon Ridge



Announcing Our 2026 Scholarship Recipients!

By Molly Dunham Glassman, Friends of Oregon Ridge Scholarship Committee

As part of our commitment to preserve the natural world, the **Friends of Oregon Ridge** is proud to foster the next generation of environmental stewards through our scholarship program. For the 32nd year, we have awarded college scholarships to graduating seniors from Baltimore County and Baltimore City high schools who are planning to major in environmental studies or nature education.

Eleven students will receive one-year **Class of 2026 Friends of Oregon Ridge Scholarships** to help defray the costs of their first year of college. One recipient, Aubrey Katz of Dulaney High in Baltimore County, has also been awarded the four-year dedicated **Getty Dutrow Mullan Scholarship**.

Leah Bagster-Collins

Leah, a graduate of Baltimore County's Loch Raven High, has been an intern at Oregon Ridge and has attended the state's Natural Resources Career Camp in Western Maryland. She will attend the Community College of Baltimore County for two years before pursuing a degree in wildlife, fish, and wildlands science and management at Frostburg State.



Emmerson Crist

Emmerson will attend Ohio Wesleyan University to study environmental science. A graduate of Carver Center for Arts & Technology, a magnet school in Baltimore County, Emmerson was captain of the field hockey team as well as an award-winning artist with many pieces focused on the environment. She hopes to work one day for the National Park Service.



Jack Dennis

Jack is a graduate of Towson High who will attend the University of Delaware to major in wildlife ecology and conservation. He spent last year as a volunteer at Cromwell Valley Park and the year before that at Harford County's Anita C. Leight Estuary Center. He has also worked at Valley View Farms since 2024, specializing in the water gardens section.



Paige Gantert

A graduate of Baltimore City's Polytechnic Institute, Paige will attend North Carolina State's College of Natural Resources. For the past two years she participated in the Ingenuity Research Practicum through Johns Hopkins University, getting hands-on lab experience in water quality research with JHU's department of environmental health.



Eva Hottenstein

Eva is an Eagle Scout and graduate of Hereford High in Baltimore County. She will attend the University of Maryland to pursue environmental engineering. For her Eagle Scout project, she planned, designed, and led ten scouts and eight adults in the restoration of two sections of native plant meadows at Irvine Nature Center.



Nalani Johnson

A graduate of the environmental science magnet at Baltimore County's Western Tech, Nalani will be enrolled in Florida A&M University's environmental science program. In high school, she took part in Constellation Energy's Youth Energy Summit and interned as a lab assistant at the Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology in Baltimore.



Aubrey Katz

As a naturalist intern at Oregon Ridge, Aubrey has earned praise for her hard work and passion for nature, and she's been hired to work with camps at the park this summer. A graduate of Dulaney High in Baltimore County, she will pursue a double major in environmental science and public health at the University of Maryland, with a career goal of working in urban agriculture. She will also receive the four-year Getty Dutrow Mullan Scholarship.



Audrey Ort

Audrey has received the Scott Roberts Memorial Scholarship, established by Polly B. Roberts, M.D., in memory of her late husband. The award goes to an outstanding student who plans to focus on marine science. An Eagle Scout, Audrey graduated from Hereford High and will be attending the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, with a concentration in marine ecology. She has been a nature camp counselor at Ladew Topiary Gardens for two years, and, for her Eagle Scout project, she built benches and a Little Library there.



Trevor Schnirel

A graduate of George Washington Carver Center for Arts & Technology in Towson, Trevor is an Eagle Scout and assistant Scoutmaster. His leadership skills carried over to athletics, where he captained the varsity soccer and baseball teams at Carver. He plans to attend Frostburg State's sustainable construction management program.



Stella Skane

Stella, who was No. 1 in her class at Catonsville High, will attend the University of North Carolina at Wilmington to study marine biology. She chose the coastal school because of its coral restoration lab, and she'll also be able to pursue her other passion, scuba diving. Stella is a triathlete and lifeguard, and one of her high school highlights was attending the National Aquarium's shark-tagging camp.



Ripley Wilson

A graduate of Baltimore City College High School, Ripley will be studying environmental science at Johns Hopkins University. She has spent summers with the Henry Hall program at the National Aquarium since fourth grade, moving into roles as a youth exhibit guide and finally as a Leader for Environmental Action Fellow in 11th and 12th grades, when she mentored middle school students in nature studies and water quality testing of the Jones Falls.



Program Calendar

Friends of Oregon Ridge

All programs require advanced registration unless otherwise noted.

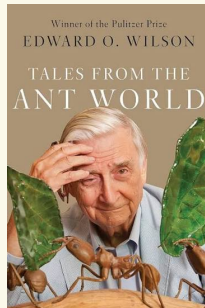
Natural Science Book Club

(A social gathering to discuss the books, not an author meet and greet)

Tales from the Ant World

Monday, July 20; 7 - 8 p.m.

Two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Edward O. Wilson takes us on a thrilling myrmecological tour across continents and through time, inviting us into his decades-long scientific obsession with ants. Animating his observations with personal stories, Wilson hones in on twenty-five ant species to explain how these creatures talk, smell, taste, and crucially, how they fight to determine dominance. Richly illustrated throughout with depictions of ant species and photos from Wilson's own expeditions, *Tales from the Ant World* is a fascinating personal account from one of our greatest scientists – and a necessary volume for any lover of the natural world.



Oregon Ridge Dulcimers Fall Session

Thursdays; 6:30-8 p.m.

**September 17, 24,
October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29;
November 5, 12 and 19**



An old-fashioned dulcimer meet-up and workshop. You only need an interest in this instrument to participate. Beginners welcome, no musical experience necessary. Loaner dulcimers are available on a first-come, first-served basis. **Register online at the following link**
<https://oregonridgenaturecenter.wildapricot.org>
Adults and children 16+, \$35 per person (\$25 for Friends of Oregon Ridge Members) Price includes 10-week session

Woodland Restoration Stewardship Work Days 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

**July 11
July 19
August 1
August 8
September 19
October 3
November 7**

We need your help to remove invasive plants and restore habitat spaces in the Woodland Restoration Garden off the Red Trail. We may branch out into other nearby areas, hoping to encourage the return of beneficial native plants. Other maintenance projects may occur. Be prepared to work outside. Tools will be available, but you are welcome to bring your favorite weeding tools along with work gloves. Adults, **FREE**
Registration for the work days will be available through www.friendsoforegonridge.org.



**Friends of
Oregon
Ridge**

**New name. New look.
Same organization.
Dedicated to the Nature Center
and Park we all love.**

Program Calendar

Baltimore County Recreation and Parks Sponsored Programs

All programs require advanced registration unless otherwise noted.

MOTH FEST

July 17, 9 p.m.-11:30 p.m.



HONEY HARVEST FESTIVAL

October 4, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.



Recurring Programs

Nature Buds

Thursdays, 10-11am, Ages 2-5

July 2 - Fireflies
 July 9 - Fossils
 July 16 - Beavers
 July 23 - Mosquitoes
 July 30 - Turtles
 August 6 - Gardens
 August 13 - Camping
 August 20 - Fishing
 August 27 - Monarchs
 September 3 - Raccoons
 September 10 - Bones, Teeth & Tails
 September 17 - Apples
 September 24 - Honeybees

Homeschool Fridays

September: Fruits & Seeds of the Forest
 October: Raptors
 November: Hibernation, Brumation, & Torpor

Mahjong on the Ridge

Sept 13 2-4pm
 October 11 2-4pm
 November 8 2-4pm

Book Club

September 14 7 p.m.-8 p.m.
 October 26 7 p.m.-8 p.m.

Archery Saturdays

July 25
 August 15
 Sept 19
 Sept 26
 October 10
 October 17
 Nov 7



Astronomy in the Park

July 24: To the Moon and Back
 August 12: The Perseids Meteor Shower
 September 26: Corn Moon & Fall Equinox Hike



Pictures in the Park

September 8-Nov 8



General Programs

July 4, 10-11 a.m.	Freedom Scavenger Hunt
July 5, 9:30-11 a.m.	History of Oregon Ridge
July 11, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.	Adult Summer Camp
July 18, 10-12 Noon	Fun with Fermentation
July 19, 1-2 p.m.	Stream Searchin'
July 26, 1-3 p.m.	Useful Knots for Nature
August 7, 5:30-8:30 p.m.	Kids Campfire (drop off program!)
August 8, 10-11 a.m.	Forest & Sound Bathing
August 1, 1-3 p.m.	Meet an Animal, Paint an Animal
August 2, 1-2 p.m.	Hawk Talk
August 9, 1-3 p.m.	Junior Entomologists
August 16, 1-3 p.m.	Mind Your 'Manders!
August 29, 10-11:30 p.m.	Water Filtration
August 29, 7:30-9 p.m.	When Mammals Fly
August 30, 1-2:30 p.m.	Insectigation
September 5, 1-3 p.m.	Natural Paint Making
September 12, 10-11 a.m.	Forest and Sound Bathing
September 13, 10-11:30 a.m.	Stream Searchin'
September 20, 7:30-9 a.m.	Morning Bird Hike
September 25, 6:30pm-8:30 p.m.	Bat Hike
September 26, 1-2:30 p.m.	Fall Fairy House
September 27, 10 a.m.-12 Noon	Hunt for Scavengers
Sept 27, 1-2:30 p.m.	PawPaw Hike

All BCRP sponsored programs can be found on Baltimore County's CivicRec Registration Site:
RecAndParks.BaltimoreCountyMD.gov/MD/baltimore-co-md/catalog (In the left column, filter for Oregon Ridge Nature Center)

Archaeology at Oregon Ridge: Living History

Early Excavation Photos

By Alan Penczek, Maryland Master Naturalist

Beginning in 1983, students enrolled in archaeology courses in Baltimore County Public Schools began excavation on six sites within the park, under the direction of George Brauer. The photos below are digitized copies of recently discovered slides taken during that time.

Students working at one of the excavation sites. Sifting screens are hung on tripods, and are then shaken to help recover artifacts from the dirt and debris.



Students patiently remove sediment at other sites within the park. The letters "BCCA" on one of the pails stand for the Baltimore County Center for Archaeology, established in 1984.



A decorated ceramic pitcher. This one features a charming pair of chicks. Very few pieces found during the excavation were intact. Many items could not be fully recreated.

A horseshoe. Teams of horses or mules were used to haul iron ore from the mines to the Oregon Furnace, or after that had shut down, to the Ashland Furnace, also in Cockeysville. The remains of both furnaces can still be seen. The wagons hauling the ore could weigh up to 10 tons.



A set of marbles. At one time, marbles were actually made from marble, but these are likely made of clay. In the 1800s, adults as well as children could be found playing marbles.



Music in the Woods 2026 Highlights

By Winnie Wong Tan

This year's Music in the Woods festival was coordinated by the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks and the Oregon Ridge Nature Center staff. Fortunately, the weather cleared by 1pm on June 6 for a sunny afternoon of listening to great music by local musicians and shopping for local products from vendors.



Ray Steelman

The music festival started with the North Country Bluegrass, and then Ray Steelman, Will Play for Fish, and the Proper Sporks continued the music on the main stage. Meanwhile, the Oregon Ridge Dulcimers, a weekly meet-up group coordinated by the Friends of Oregon Ridge, played a few sets near the picnic tables across from

the sugar shack. As the music from the stage and the picnic area reverberated through the open air, five hundred guests relaxed and enjoyed tunes under the shade of the trees.



North Country Bluegrass



Will Play for Fish



Proper Sporks

Festival goers also had several other activities to entertain them.

The Nature Center staff had a tent with frog crafts and games. Staff and volunteers also showed live animals, and the raptors – as always - delighted the crowds. Down in the meadow, the Friends of Oregon Ridge offered free crafts, including crocodile-shaped castanets, popsicle stick harmonicas, rain sticks, shakers, and sand art bottles. The Friends also sold maple syrup, honey, books, puppets, and fun ribbon wands and

support our mission. The Natural History Society of Maryland showed their live moth collection and other artifacts, and a dog rescue promoted adoptions with a couple of their foster dogs. Also, attendees had a chance to enjoy lawn games and a bubble station.



Naturalist Anthony Snyder tells a family about the history of the well by the Peter Goff Tenant House.

The Friends would like to say thank you to the

volunteers who spent the afternoon ensuring the sound system worked for the stage, helping kids create crafts, and supporting the Friends' membership and sales table: Gary Anderson, Judy Breitenbach, Ann Canoles, Noot Canoles, Lynn Faulkner, Mike Gillispie, Amy Gold, Craig Gold, Karen Jackson, Kathy Kadow, Diane Lonsdale, Joanne Marshall, Avery Tan, Chloe Tan, Winnie Tan, Paw Ward, and Claire Craig.



The Oregon Ridge Dulcimers

Finally, we would like to thank all of the festival goers who joined us despite the weather and whose presence helped to make this event a success.

Speaker Series Recap: The Meadow Challenge

By Martha Johnston, Certified Maryland Master Naturalist

In summer, the meadows at Oregon Ridge reach their glory. Sun-loving native plants bloom in progression summer into fall – wild bergamot, milkweed, partridge pea, goldenrod, and more. Butterflies, native bees, and other pollinators abound. Bluebirds hunt insects to feed their young while goldfinches collect seed for their late-season broods. Observant meadow visitors can spot ground-nesting birds, like Common Yellowthroat, tending nestlings hidden in the thick grasses. Meadows provide a rich and critical habitat, adding to the park's biodiversity.

To deepen our appreciation of meadows, in March 2026, the Friends of Oregon Ridge Speaker Series welcomed ecologist **John Canoles** of Eco-Science Professionals, who presented a program entitled *The Meadow Challenge*. A well-known and popular speaker, Mr. Canoles started his career as a seasonal naturalist at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center and later served on the board and as president of ORNC Council. For the Speaker Series, Mr. Canoles led an enlightening and entertaining dive into the characteristics, benefits and threats to Maryland meadows, which we highlight here.

Types of meadow

Meadows are open habitats predominated by grasses, flowers and other non-woody plants. While the Alpine meadows of the Rockies and the prairies of the Midwest aren't found on the East Coast, our speaker described varying types of meadows in Maryland, including:

- **Transitional meadows or old fields**, like those at Oregon Ridge
- **Agricultural meadows**, like hay fields
- **Tidal marsh meadows**
- **Wetland meadows**
- **Serpentine barrens**, like Soldier's Delight Natural Environment Area

Meadow benefits

The different meadow types offer distinct habitats, functions and environmental benefits. Some of these include:

- **Important and unique habitat**, providing food and shelter throughout the year and supporting species that thrive in that meadow type's conditions, including many specialist and rare species. Wildflowers, grasses, ground-dwelling birds and certain hawks, insects at all stages, mammals, reptiles and snakes are part of meadow ecosystems. For example, more than 100 species of butterflies and moths rely on goldenrod – a meadow mainstay – as a larval host plant or for late-season nectar.
- **Improved water quality and flood control**. Thick vegetation



Hummingbird Clearwing moth (*Hemaris thysbe*) nectars in an Oregon Ridge meadow
Photo by Martha Johnston



John Canoles presented "The Meadow Challenge"



Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*) visits goldenrod for late-season food
Photo by Martha Johnston

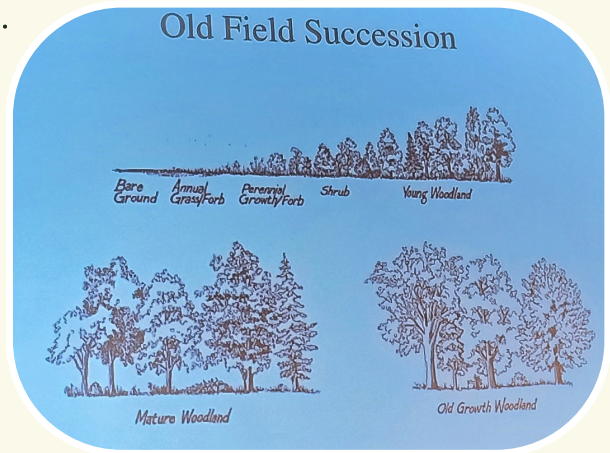
slows flooding, filters water, and helps prevent erosion.

- **Carbon sequestration** in deep and thick root systems

Threats to meadows

With all these positives, why call this program *The Meadow Challenge*? As Mr. Canoles explained, Maryland has already lost much of its meadow lands. These beneficial systems are under constant threat from natural and external factors.

- **Natural succession** is a foremost challenge. Old fields are by their nature ephemeral and subject to succession to woodland, unless properly managed.
- **Invasive species**, including aggressive woody invasive species, like Callery pear and multiflora rose, accelerate natural succession.
- **Reforestation projects** that displace under-appreciated meadows and old fields
- **Certain intensive industrial agriculture practices**
- **Development**



Old field natural succession

Saving meadows

With renewed appreciation, we can maintain and expand our meadows and meadow-like habitats. On public and larger private lands, meadows can be managed to control succession and deter woody plants from taking hold. Techniques include scheduled mowings, like at Oregon Ridge, and prescribed burns, which are carried out as part of the ecosystem restoration program at Soldiers Delight.

Those of us with less space can create mini-meadows and pollinator gardens in sunny yards, containers, and neighborhood spaces by adding sun-loving native plants and avoiding the use of pesticides. (**Tip:** Shop at nurseries selling locally native plants or seed mixes or participate in native plant exchanges. Avoid generic "wildflower" seed mixes, which too often include exotic species.)



*Indigo Bunting (Passerina cyanea) on senna.
Photo by Martha Johnston*



*Viceroy butterfly (Limenitis archippus).
Photo by John Canoles*

On your next visit to the meadows at Oregon Ridge, while you enjoy the beauty and observe the wildlife, consider the many benefits provided by these complex and bountiful habitats.



*Asters and goldenrod
Photo by John Canoles*

Annual Meeting Recap: A Year of Meaningful Growth

By Roscoe Possidente, Vice President, Friends of Oregon Ridge

On June 2nd, 2026, Friends of Oregon Ridge (FOR) gathered for our 2026 Annual Meeting at the Lake Pavilion. Together, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of our organization's transition from the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council (serving the community since 1982) to our new identity as the Friends of Oregon Ridge. It has been a challenging period of balancing who we were with who we want to be.

President's Vision: The New

In her opening address, **President Winny Tan** reflected on our accomplishments in creating a new identity: "This year has been about refining who we are, how we operate, and the impact we want to make." To do this, the board developed a five-year strategic plan and worked on succession planning throughout the fiscal year.

A highlight of the evening was the announcement of our newly adopted mission statement, which came from the board's discussions:

"The Friends of Oregon Ridge is dedicated to the protection of Oregon Ridge Nature Center and Park by engaging the public through education and stewardship, fostering connections with nature for generations."

At the heart of this mission are four core principles that emerged during collaboration with Baltimore County on the Oregon Ridge Master Plan: *Protect, Restore, Enhance, and Educate*.

Major Projects Spotlight: The New and the Ongoing

Our project coordinators shared significant milestones from this year:

Sindhu Moon gave a moving presentation of the impact of the new **School Bus Grant Program**. We awarded \$7,185.93 to Title 1 schools in Baltimore County, with 12 schools and 590 students taking part. This program has ensured that economic barriers will not prevent students from experiencing the wonders of Oregon Ridge.

Winny Tan highlighted the progress of the **Woodland Garden Project** initiative that launched in 2017. In 2022, it received state funding approval. Since then, invasive species, including garlic mustard, oriental bittersweet, wavy leaf basket grass, Japanese stilt grass, and tree of heaven have been removed. Baltimore County Recreation and Parks (BCRP) installed fencing and removed snag tops in 2025. And, with more than 20 volunteers contributing their time, over \$1,200 worth of native plants are now planted.

Jillian Kane presented an update on **Hickory Tree Planting** for coordinator Don Callihan, announcing that 18 hickory trees were planted on May 18th. Below-ground caging and above-ground protection were installed to protect these Mockernut and pignut species. Twenty community members took part in this restoration effort.

Volunteer Recognition: The Ongoing

It was with sincere and heartfelt appreciation that three volunteers were honored with citations from the Office of the County Executive for Significant Contributions to the Community, each having given over a decade of service:



Winny Wong Tan

Tom Farrell brings deep knowledge of local flora, fauna, and mammals to Oregon Ridge. He guides field trips, helps with programs and work groups, supports special events, and mentors new volunteers. Tom also supports organizations like the Maryland Historical Society of Maryland, recently recognized by Governor Moore as the State's Museum of Natural Science, starting October 1st.



Tom Farrell



Alan Penczek

Alan Penczek shares his passion for the park's rich history through the tenant house team. He teaches visitors about Oregon Ridge's past, crafts campfires for evening programs, and provides steady support across countless moments throughout the year.

Kathy Kadow, serving as both Communications Chair and Programming Chair on the Friends of Oregon Ridge Board, manages social media accounts, our website, and the membership database. She runs two monthly public programs (Senior Stroll and Me and My Pup), leads honeybee outreach programs, participates in the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA), and brings best practices back to strengthen Board operations.



Kathy Kadow

Scholarship Program Celebrates Another Year



Molly Dunham Glassman

Donna DeLeno Neuworth and Molly Glassman presented the 2026 scholarship recipients after student speaker Miles Spangler reflected on how last year's scholarship affected him. The Friends continue to offer annual college scholarships alongside our new Title I Field Trip Bus Scholarships, both vital investments in the next generation of conservation leaders.



Donna DeLeno Neuworth

Looking Ahead

Closing emcee **Charlie Davis** noted: "It has been a year of meaningful work. Board members became Weed Warrior certified and participated in BCRP Listening Sessions to advocate for trail repairs and park maintenance. We are also hopeful that two new habitat exhibit projects will be completed by the end of this year."

Most importantly, though the name of our community has changed, our goal has not. Whether as the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council or the Friends of Oregon Ridge, we remain committed to working closely with Oregon Ridge staff, Baltimore County Recreation and Parks, and community members to build a stronger future for our beloved 1,000-plus-acre park.



Charlie Davis

Friends of Oregon Ridge Annual Report 2025-2026

By Winny Wong Tan



The Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council, ORNCC, has been operating since 1982, and, though that organization is now defunct, our community will continue to do what it has always done: support the Nature Center and Park, promote conservation and activities, and protect the park. We have completed our first year operating under our new name, the Friends of Oregon Ridge, and we are still the ORNCC at the soul of our organization. However, we are evolving so we can strengthen our roots to continue advocating for Oregon Ridge for the next several decades.

To that end, the Friends worked with a consultant and now has a 5-year strategic plan that has been underway since September 2025, with three main goals: 1. Strengthen our internal processes, 2. Advance key priorities in the Master Plan, and 3. Sharpen our ability to advocate for the park.

We also had the opportunity to work with Maryland Nonprofits to deep dive into different organizational areas for improvement. This year, we worked on revising our by-laws which were last revised in 2017, re-evaluated the board structure, created a board manual and committee operating procedures, assessed our financial records, advanced recruitment efforts, attended Baltimore County Recreation and Parks (BCRP) Listening Sessions to voice concerns and needs of the park, spoke with elected officials on the importance of maintaining the trails and following the Oregon Ridge Master Plan, and provided community support this past year.

Our Friends of Oregon Ridge Board and committees are fully made up of volunteers who donate their time and talents throughout the year in collaboration with the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Naturalists I and II, Jill Kane and Anthony Snyder. Our committees have made valuable contributions to strengthening stewardship activities, membership, information systems, communications, and programming. These are some of the highlights of this past year:

- 1. New Title 1 Bus grants awarded \$7,200 to 12 Baltimore County and City Schools culminating in 590 students who were able to attend Oregon Ridge school field trips.**
- 2. Annual college scholarships amounted to \$10,000 from the Friends and then an additional \$40,000 from donors.**
- 3. We donated over \$800 in garden and trail tools to Nature Center stewardship projects.**
- 4. We removed invasive plants, mulched the central path, and installed \$1,200 worth of native plants from an earmarked fund within the woodland restoration garden, all with about 20 volunteers.**
- 5. We planted 2 types of hickory trees, mockernut and pignut species, and installed below-ground caging and above-ground protection with 20 community members. The Friends donated \$500 to this project.**
- 6. We planted native perennials that a volunteer propagated around the Nature Center.**
- 7. We maintained members' benefits, including free admission for the speaker series and program registrations, and reduced admission tickets to the Pancake Breakfast.**
- 8. We provided hot drinks at the Winter Solstice event and free craft activities at the Music in the Woods, which culminated in the Friends contributing around \$500 to the BCRP events.**

We still have ongoing projects such as the woodland garden, trails, and exhibits that have been in the works. We received County Council approval in March 2026 for our \$15,000 donation to create a landscape design and maintenance plan for the woodland restoration project. There are also plans for future educational exhibit panels for this conservation area. The Exhibits Committee is continuing their work with a \$6,000 budget for new habitat display panels inside the Nature Center and a Chonolog post to help document the changing meadow landscape.

We ask the reader to join us in the wonderful work the Friends of Oregon Ridge are doing in the park or to consider donating to the projects and scholarships that give back to the community. As I step down as President at the end of August, I will continue to serve on the Oregon Ridge board as Director at Large to continue advocating for the mission and for keeping the park accessible to all. Thank you to all who have continued to support the Friends and to all the volunteers who are so passionate and giving.

Title I Transportation Fund Annual Meeting Recap

By Sindhu Moon



I'd like for each of you to take a moment to think back to when you were a young child going on a school field trip. Do you remember your excitement going someplace new with your friends, with a brown paper lunch bag in hand, and the bumpy bus ride to your destination? Did you go to D.C. to visit a museum or see a play? Maybe you went to the zoo or the aquarium, or maybe you visited a nature center much like this one to learn about local flora and fauna.

Last year, **Friends of Oregon Ridge** wanted to double down on the education component of our mission, so the council decided to set aside funds to bring students from Title I

schools to the Nature Center for field trips. Along with my committee members, **Roscoe Possidente** and **Debbie Bacharach** - and with the help of Jill Kane, our naturalist - I had the privilege of creating the documents and format of what is now our Title I Transportation Fund.

Some of you may be asking, "What is a Title I school?" That's a good question. A Title I school is a public school that receives federal assistance through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to support students from low-income families, and the school's eligibility for these funds is usually measured by the number of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Baltimore County has 71 Title I schools (63 elementary and 8 middle), and Baltimore City has 112.

The 2025-2026 academic year was our transportation fund's inaugural year, and I am so proud to share that we provided 12 Title I schools (8 in the county and 4 in the city) with funds up to \$500 per bus to bring students to and from Oregon Ridge Nature Center, where Jill Kane and the Nature Center staff provided free field trips. **We brought 590 students through those Nature Center doors.** That number does not include the teachers and parent chaperones who enjoyed our programs as well. For many, this was their first time at our park.

Field trips, and more specifically, nature center field trips, enhance experiential learning. They foster curiosity and encourage appreciation of nature. By inviting Title I schools to explore Oregon Ridge, we are offering educational equity and exposing students to environmental professions and broadening future career paths.

Post-pandemic, we have seen an increase in the number of young people who are suffering mental health issues. Now, I'm not saying that our park is a cure, but it is worth mentioning that a report from the American Psychological Association mentions that spending time in nature lowers stress, boosts mood, and improves mental health, and even if it's a placebo effect, I think it's certainly worth it.

And now for the numbers...Friends of Oregon Ridge spent \$7,185.93 to bring 590 students from 12 schools to the Nature Center. **That works out to \$12.18 per student.** If you'd allow me, I'd like to share with you a quote from one of the Title I school grant recipients, Kathleen Sayers, an elementary school teacher from Southwest Baltimore Community School:

"Buses are extremely expensive and often prohibit our students from taking field trips. When families are asked to pay for buses, it ends up being around \$30 per family. That is undoable for the majority of our students who struggle with funds for food, housing, and other ongoing needs. This grant enables my students to explore Oregon Ridge, learn about animals and habitats, and engage with nature. We loved our time there."

So, the next time you see Debbie Bacharach waving you over to the membership table, asking you to join or renew your membership. Or the next time you see us hosting a pancake breakfast fundraiser or asking you to buy our maple syrup or compost, I want you to smile as you open your wallet knowing that every dollar you spend with Friends of Oregon Ridge goes towards planting baby hickory trees, providing a bench to rest your weary body after a long hike, and - more to the point of this article - allowing children who may not have otherwise had an opportunity to touch a snakeskin, splash in a stream looking for critters, and taste REAL fresh maple syrup after helping to tap a maple tree. We thank you for bringing smiles, laughter, and field trip memories to 590 children in our area, but we need your help for us to continue to do so. **This program would not have been possible - and will not be possible - without your generosity and support. Thank you!**



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