the importance of parks

Nature: A Public Health Imperative

As Atlanta’s population grows and the urban environment is developed, our access to nature and greenspace is at risk. What would we lose if we lost our connection to nature? What would that mean for our health and quality of life? And what role do urban parks play in maintaining that connection?

Nature is Medicine

At the 2019 Parks and Greenspace Conference, keynote speaker Dr. Nooshin Razani, Director of the Center for Nature & Health at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland, argued for a “daily dose of nature.”

Her research shows that each time a patient visits a park, their cortisol (the hormone linked to stress) levels decrease an incremental amount below their previous visit. This suggests that repeated exposure to nature has greater benefits than a single visit alone.

Dr. Razani’s research also demonstrates that nature strengthens mental and emotional resilience in both kids and adults, an effect that can literally add years to your life.

“Those who live in greener neighborhoods have reduced mortality,” said Dr. Razani. “To me, that means that access to nature is absolutely a public health imperative.”

Access to Nature in the City

Parks are the crux of urban dwellers’ access to nature, whether it be via a wooded trail, stone steps across a babbling creek, a pollinator garden, or a perfectly placed bench under a shade tree. All children and adults deserve to have a quality park within walking distance of their home that they can visit regularly for their daily dose of nature.

If proactive steps to protect greenspace and increase access to nature are not taken now, thousands of Atlanta-area residents are at risk of not being able to access parks and the associated health benefits that can last a lifetime (see Public Schools as Public Land on p. 3 to learn how Park Pride is working to increase access to parks).

“...access to nature is absolutely a public health imperative.”

~ Dr. Nooshin Razani
How Can You Protect and Promote Nature in the City?

• Get involved to preserve and protect nature. City of Atlanta residents need to take proactive measures to ensure that our urban forests and natural areas are protected and that access to them is enhanced.

  Atlanta’s Department of City Planning is developing the Urban Ecology Framework (UEF), a plan to determine what aspects of nature (forests, greenspaces, rivers) in Atlanta should be preserved, restored, and accentuated. Attend a public meeting to let your voice be heard in favor of preserving natural areas for future generations to enjoy (visit bit.ly/urbanecologyatl for more information).

  You can also write to your City Council representative and tell them that you support policies that bring parks within walking distance of all residents (citycouncil.atlantaga.gov).

• Share a daily dose of nature with friends and family. Everyone benefits from time spent outside. Below are some of Park Pride staff’s favorite places to get their daily dose of nature close to home:

  ° At Cascade Springs Nature Preserve in southwest Atlanta, you’ll find trails, moss-covered boulders, native plants and wildlife, and a waterfall cascading into Utoy Creek.

  ° Constitution Lakes Park features a lake and beautiful wetlands crossed with a boardwalk and meandering trails in south DeKalb.

  ° A hidden gem outside the perimeter, Tucker’s Henderson Park offers over four miles of wooded hiking trails, as well as a Native Plant and Wildlife Walk!

  ° Ashford Forest Preserve is a serene 30-acre natural area in Brookhaven. The park offers peaceful respite with walking trails through old growth forest, meadows, and wetlands.

To learn more about Dr. Razani’s research on childhood health, her practice, and the Park Prescription initiative, view her TEDxNashville video: bit.ly/razanitedx.
Imagine you’re a kid living in an apartment building in an area of town without access to a park. Where can you go outside to play that’s safe? “If the answer is ‘nowhere,’” says Park Pride’s Executive Director, Michael Halicki, “chances are you’ll just stay inside and play video games. We must do better for these kids, and thinking creatively about our public land is the answer.”

According to The Trust for Public Land’s 2019 ParkScore index (an evaluation of park access and quality in the 100 largest U.S. cities), 29 percent of Atlantans do not live within walking distance of a public park or greenspace. Nearly one-third of Atlanta’s kids, adults, and seniors therefore, do not have access to the health benefits of parks close to where they live.

Park Pride believes that everyone deserves to live within walking distance of a great park. That is why we’ve partnered with The Trust for Public Land, the Urban Land Institute, Atlanta’s Department of Parks & Recreation, and Atlanta Public Schools to think creatively about multiple uses for public lands with the Atlanta Community Schoolyards initiative.

The Atlanta Community Schoolyards initiative will increase access to public land and park-like spaces by opening schoolyards for public enjoyment outside of school hours. Three schools in the City of Atlanta will be chosen to participate in the pilot program, giving families who live in “park deserts” safe outdoor recreation space close to home.

Each school will receive about $100,000 of capital improvements to update the schoolyards to meet the communities’ needs. With the support of a generous grant from The Trust for Public Land, Park Pride will lead visioning efforts within the neighborhoods to determine what investments can be made to the schoolyards to create vibrant public spaces (new benches, shade structures, water fountains, or community gardens, for example).

The schoolyard visioning meetings will kick-off this fall, and by the end of 2020, three Atlanta communities in need of access to parks will enjoy open schoolyards and the enhanced recreational opportunities that they’ll offer!
Digging In for the Greener Good

In 2018, over 6,700 Park Pride volunteers completed 253 projects (building bridges and footpaths, improving trails, installing gardens, painting pavilions, mulching beds, etc.) in parks and along the Atlanta BeltLine. Taken together, their efforts equal a sweat equity investment of over $450,000. Thank you, volunteers, for your unwavering commitment to the greener good! We’re on track for another great year of volunteering in 2019. Enjoy some of the highlights to date below.

**Greener Good Volunteers at Tanyard Creek Park**

Over 60 volunteers supported a native forest improvement project along the Atlanta BeltLine. Many volunteers represented BeltLine adopter groups, including the Collier Hills Civic Association, Cushman & Wakefield, Wells Fargo, and WSP. Special thanks to the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, Trees Atlanta, and Bank of America.

**Rotary Club of Atlanta at Washington Park**

As part of a city-wide day of service, nearly 30 Atlanta Rotarians joined Park Pride and The Conservancy at Historic Washington Park to expand garden beds and rejuvenate a well-used pavilion. Volunteers planted herbs for community harvesting and pollinator plants to add beauty and function to the beds.

**Greener Good Volunteers at Zonolite Park**

Equipped with waders and determination, hardy volunteers mucked through the retention pond at Zonolite Park, removing hundreds of noxious cattails. Additionally, volunteers planted pollinator plants that will attract bees and butterflies and support the productivity of the park’s community garden.

**Cox Volunteers at Ashford Forest Preserve**

Sheltered by the shade of Ashford Forest Preserve’s tree canopy, volunteers from Cox helped to beautify two of the park’s trailheads though clearing overgrown vegetation, removing trash, and mulching. Even in the blazing heat, Cox volunteers worked hard and accomplished a ton of work!

Strengthen your corporate team or community group through a volunteer project with Park Pride. Visit Park Pride’s website to begin the planning process: parkpride.org/volunteer.
project updates from around town

Parks for Everyone, Everywhere

Chapel Hill Park

On a soggy April morning, neighbors, DeKalb County commissioners, representatives from the county’s Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs, police officers, and Park Pride huddled under the pavilion at Chapel Hill Park to celebrate the completed construction of the park’s new fishing pier.

Ms. Linda Cotten Taylor, leader of the Friends of Chapel Hill Park and Atlanta’s 2016 Cox Conserves Hero, delivered passionate remarks. “Parks,” she exclaimed, “are one of the few places you can go with the whole family for free and find something for everyone.”

With the addition of this beautiful fishing pier, funded in part by a Park Pride Community Building Grant (supported by The Home Depot Foundation), her sentiment is truer than ever.

Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park

Since ground broke at Kathryn Johnston Memorial Park in August 2018, anticipation and excitement for the completion of this new park in English Avenue continues to rise.

Incorporating several green infrastructure amenities (such as the raingarden pictured below, left), this park will manage up to 3.5 million gallons of rainwater per year, mitigating the impact of flooding from stormwater runoff in the neighborhood. The park will also include a playground, fitness station, and greenspace for games of soccer or flying kites.

Once completed in the fall of 2019, English Avenue residents will have another safe place to relax, exercise, play with their families, and meet their neighbors!

a volunteer perspective: the power of parks

Peggy Allumbaugh
Park Pride Board Member

When I heard that Park Pride was celebrating Earth Day with a volunteer project at Zonolite Park, I immediately signed up. I’ve watched the park transform over the years, and as a Park Pride board member, it was high time for me to get my hands dirty.

Through this volunteer project, I learned firsthand the meaning of “the power of parks.”

Parks build community

Though I didn’t know many of the volunteers before that day, we laughed, joked, and encouraged each other to keep going as we hauled cattails from the pond to the compost. We bonded over our common desire to improve this park for all visitors (including wildlife, like the migratory birds!) to enjoy.

Parks are good for your health

The boost of vitamin D from the sunshine paired with an elevated heart rate from moving heavy loads of plant matter felt as great as any gym workout!

Park Pride will host more Greener Good Volunteer Days this fall, each offering an opportunity to build community and enjoy the health benefits of being outside and working hard. I hope you’ll join me!

Visit parkpride.org/events for more information.

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The 18th Annual Parks & Greenspace Conference, *Parks are the Heart of Community*, explored the power of parks to reflect culture and artistic expression while providing places to pursue healthy lives. Local and national experts and thought leaders challenged us to expand our ideas about access to parks and public spaces, shared insights into the research linking parks to our health, and invoked the power of parks to help achieve a more united, supportive, and connected community for people of all ages and abilities.

**Keynote Speakers**

"When we work on parks and recreation, what we’re really doing is improving the quality of life. What if everything you did in Atlanta—the sidewalks, the park, the cross walk, the gardens, the restaurants, the library, the schools—had to be great for an 8 and 80-year-old? We must stop building cities as if everyone was 30 years old." — Gil Peñalosa, Founder and Chair of 8 80 Cities

"Our theory is that nature promotes resilience. What nature does—through stress reduction, through physical activity, through promoting social ties—is push a person’s balance toward resilience, to being able to tolerate stress so that it doesn’t become toxic. We believe that is the reason why living in and around nature can improve lifespan."

— Dr. Nooshin Razani, MD, Director of the Center for Nature and Health at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland

"Equity. I’m going to boil it down to one simple word: Fairness. Are we fair about how to distribute our capital dollars? Too often we think that if we make an improvement that there’s going to be vandalism. If you care for the community and respect them, they in turn care for you and they take care of the park." — Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

**At the Parks & Greenspace Conference, six park leaders were honored with Inspiration Awards.**

**JyQuan Almond**
JyQuan, a charismatic leader at the Urban Food Forest at Browns Mill, builds trails, plants trees and crops, and serves as a tour guide. He is a role model to all... though he’s just 12 years old!

**Nancy Boyd**
Thanks to Nancy’s dedication to the Freedom Park Conservancy, Freedom Park will receive three new works of art from the City of Atlanta in 2019, elevating the experience of Freedom Park for all.

**Jessie Hayden**
Jessie played a key role to protect what’s now Briarlake Forest Park from development. She helped craft the park plan, incorporating natural elements for both human and wildlife visitors.

**Bill Lide**
As a board member and volunteer coordinator of the Friends of Kittredge Park, Bill created a culture of giving that has helped to fund park improvements, making it a safe place for people to relax and enjoy nature.

**Billie Walker**
Billie believes that a park’s purpose is to be an inclusive space that anchors neighborhoods. Her passion for community engagement has made Mattie Freeland Greenspace a welcoming place for all.

**Lewis Woodson**
As the Committee Chairman of NPU-P’s Parks and Recreation Committee, Lewis is a neighborhood champion that has engaged both community and civic leaders to strengthen the connection between people and greenspace.
new park pride staff: meet the team

**Elizabeth Bogue**  
supports the grantmaking and Fiscal Partner Programs as a Program Associate.

**Monica Johnson**  
supports Park Pride’s fundraising efforts as the Foundation & Donor Relations Associate.

Additionally, six interns have joined us for the summer, using their knowledge and enthusiasm to increase the capacity of staff:

**Susmita Ahangkari**  
Community Building Intern; GED student at Eckerd Connects

**Jessica Hayhurst**  
Special Events Intern; 2019 graduate from Berry College

**Ruth Pimentel**  
Park Visioning Intern; graduate research assistant at Georgia Tech.

**Grace Raulet**  
Park Visioning Intern; student at the University of Georgia

**Claire Weitnauer**  
Communications + Development Intern; 2018 graduate from Davidson College

**Helena Wright**  
Community Building Intern; student at Georgia Tech.

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**Corporate Champions**

Thank you to the following organizations for their extraordinary generosity in support of Park Pride's mission!

**visionary**

- The Home Depot
- Kaiser Permanente

**benefactor**

- Cox Enterprises
- Cox Conserves

**sustainer**

- Atlanta Botanical Garden
- Georgia-Pacific

**activator**

- Georgia Power
- Wells Fargo

**hero**

- Allstate
- Conservation Fund
- Ed Castro Landscape

**advocate**

- HGOR
- Integrated Landscape
- Invesco

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**Become a Champion for Parks!**

Please reach out to Chad Nash, Corporate and Individual Giving Associate, to learn more. chad@parkpride.org or 404-546-7984.
Park Pride events & important dates

June
29 Volunteer: LOVE ATLANTA Project on the Atlanta BeltLine

July
11 Park Pride’s Monthly Park Meeting
20 Workshop: Park Design Clinic

August
1 Deadline: Small Change Grant Applications (Q3)
8 Park Pride’s Monthly Park Meeting

September
12 Park Pride’s Monthly Park Meeting
14 Volunteer: Greener Good Volunteer Day
19 Green Tie Gala

Mission
To engage communities to activate the power of parks.

Park Views Online
bit.ly/parkpridenumbers

Robin Aiken
Homrich Berg
Kirk Billings
Pope & Land Real Estate
C.J. Cash
Jeffrey Ellman
Jones Day
Courtney Fletcher
Doosan Infracore International, Inc.
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Tamara C. Stewart
Kaiser Permanente
Esther Stokes
Stokes Landscape Design
Caroline Vroon
Cherokee Garden Club
Joni Winston
Center of Joy

Three cheers for 30 years!
Not your typical, stuffy gala, Park Pride is taking the party to the Westside to commemorate our 30th anniversary on Thursday, September 19th.

Don your “picnic-chic” and your comfortable dancing shoes because we’ve got a lot to celebrate, and this event is not to be missed!
parkpride.org/gala