

2026 FALL AWARDS CELEBRATION



PARTNERS FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT

September 30, 2026
LEARNING TREE FARM



The Partners for the Environment is an alliance of environmental organizations, government and civic organizations, and public and private educational institutions. These organizations share the common goal of protecting, restoring, preserving, and promoting the environmental and agricultural resources of the Great Miami River and Little Miami River Watersheds – an 18 county region in southwest Ohio.

Our Mission

Connecting people, issues, resources and organizations to increase our collective impact and provide environmental leadership for a healthy sustainable region.

Our Vision

To be a nationally-recognized leader for our capability to maximize educational, civic, governmental, and private resources for the Partner organizations who work to improve the quality of life for the communities in the Great Miami River and Little Miami River watersheds.



PARTNERS FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sarah Hippensteel Hall*, Miami Conservancy District

Eric Sauer*, Five Rivers MetroParks

Caitlin Botschner, Field In Sight Consulting

Michele Burns, Tecumseh Land Trust

Steve Carne, Partners for the Environment

Matt Lindsay, Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission

Heather Pax, Learning Tree Farm

Deb Oexmann, Brukner Nature Center

Beth Edsall, Beaver Creek Wetlands Association

Gayle Covington Fowler, The Genstitute

Leigh Ann Miller, Audubon Society

*Co-Chairs

Participation in the Partners for the Environment is open to any organization that works to protect, restore, preserve, and promote the environmental and agricultural resources in the Great Miami River and Little Miami River watersheds and is interested in leveraging and maximizing their resources to further those goals.

The Partner organizations include community-based organizations, local and regional governments, educational institutions and private and business interests that work within the Great Miami River and Little Miami River watersheds.

Thank You

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GOLD LEVEL SPONSORS



**Kathy Arnett &
Mark Pugle**



SILVER LEVEL SPONSORS



xylem
Let's Solve Water





GREENE COUNTY PARKS & TRAILS

CHECK US
OUT ON
FACEBOOK!

FUN FOR
EVERY
ONE

SO MUCH TO DO,
NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE.

Greene County Parks & Trails manages more than 25 parks and nature preserves, along with an extensive trail network that connects our communities and invites everyone to explore. From hiking and biking, to nature programs, family adventures, educational experiences, and special events, there are countless ways to enjoy the outdoors in Greene County. Greene County Parks & Trails brings people together to discover, learn, play, and appreciate the natural world right in their own backyard!

Find out more: www.gcparkstrails.com





SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR AWARD

CITY OF KETTERING SUSTAINABILITY TEAM

The City of Kettering is demonstrating how local government can turn sustainability goals into practical action. Sustainability is incorporated into the city's 2024–2029 Strategic Plan, and in 2025 Kettering appointed Dawn Kirchner as its first Sustainability Manager, creating dedicated leadership to advance that commitment across city operations and the community.

Since then, Kettering has expanded efforts in waste reduction, recycling and composting; undertaken greenhouse gas inventory work; promoted watershed stewardship through Adopt-A-Drain; and created opportunities such as EcoFest and Shred Day that make it easier for residents to participate. The city has also built partnerships with organizations including the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and Little Miami Watershed Network.

By pairing municipal leadership with public education and regional collaboration, Kettering is creating a model for how communities can make sustainability a meaningful part of everyday decision-making.





PARTNER OF THE YEAR



MARIANIST ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER (MEEC)

For nearly four decades, the Marianist Environmental Education Center has demonstrated what long-term, place-based environmental stewardship can accomplish. At Mount Saint John, MEEC has helped restore nearly 100 acres of land while bringing people together to learn about and participate in caring for the natural world.

Its accomplishments include establishing a 62-acre permanent conservation easement with Tecumseh Land Trust; creating native prairie and pollinator habitat, including a three-acre solar prairie; and conducting 16 years of weekly butterfly monitoring that has documented more than 32,000 butterflies representing 65 species. MEEC's annual native plant sale has put more than 11,000 native plants into the community, while volunteers have contributed thousands of hours to restoration and education.

Through partnerships with organizations across the region, MEEC continues to demonstrate how restoration, education, faith and community action can work together to create lasting environmental change.







INDIVIDUAL OF THE YEAR

AMANDA BADGER | WILD HEARTS AFRICAN FARM

Amanda Badger, founder and director of Wild Hearts African Farm, has built an organization where encounters with animals become opportunities to inspire curiosity, compassion and a deeper understanding of conservation. Her enthusiasm and ability to connect with people make environmental education approachable and memorable for audiences of all ages.

Under Amanda's leadership, Wild Hearts has developed partnerships with schools, libraries, civic organizations, nonprofits, businesses and local governments to bring conservation education directly into communities. She has also been generous in making those experiences available to groups and programs throughout the region, including Leadership Preble County and the Preble County Expo.

Amanda's creativity, energy and collaborative spirit have helped Wild Hearts grow into an important conservation education resource—and have inspired countless people to think differently about wildlife and their own role in protecting the natural world.





LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



CARRIE SCARFF | FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS

Carrie Scarff has devoted her career to protecting natural resources, expanding public access to nature and strengthening the parks, trails and river corridors that define the Miami Valley. As Chief of Planning for Five Rivers MetroParks, she has helped guide planning, design, construction and land protection efforts that have shaped some of the region's most recognizable and valued public spaces.

Her influence can be seen in RiverScape MetroPark and RiverScape River Run, expanded outdoor recreation opportunities, protected open space, trail connections and efforts to reconnect neighborhoods with waterways. Carrie also helped lead the Dayton Riverfront Plan, bringing multiple partners together around a shared vision for the Great Miami, Mad and Stillwater rivers and Wolf Creek. Her work has consistently connected conservation, recreation, public access and community development.

As Carrie concludes her career with Five Rivers MetroParks, her legacy can be found not only in individual projects, but throughout a regional system that gives people greater access to nature, rivers and one another.







ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS PROGRAM

Our 12-month program fosters the development of environmental leaders in our region so they can create positive change to address current and future environmental issues through their community and civic engagement.

Our upcoming program's monthly half-day classes will be held typically the third Thursday starting in Sept. 2026, and ending in Aug. 2027, with at most 12 participants. The highly interactive/conversational approach for each class will allow engagement, reflection, and mentorship to foster learning and allow for more individual exploration of key program lessons.

The course work flow will build on the cohort's learning more about their own operating style and their own "why" regarding their pursuit of environmental leadership. It will then build to help the cohort learn more about how they can work with others to impact change. In the later months of the program, the cohort will gain a greater understanding of how they can effect change in their community.

Who can apply to this program?

Applicants come from varying backgrounds, each with a passion for creating change in their community through educating, engaging on or with key community boards and organizations, and/or developing new ideas and paths forward for a healthy future in our community.



ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS

Graduating 2026 Cohort

Gina Balzar
Katie Guirnalda
Katy Lucas
Kelsea Downs
Mackenna
Cristilly
Molly Savage
Rebecca Carr
Robert Christman
Sarah Bills
Tess Keener
Tom Buckley

Incoming 2027 Cohort

Jord Christopher
Jerry Bowling III
Janae Christopher
Abigayl Cochran
Hope Elliott
Preston Lawson
Natasha Miller
Isabel Brumley
Loura Lawrence
Hagan Messer

PLANNING COMMITTEE & MENTORS

Eric Sauer
Kathy Arnett
Cheryl Vargas
Meredith Florkey
Brian Raison
Steve Carne
Connie O'Connor
Bill Schieman
Cinda Hanbuch-Pinkerton
Doug Horvath

PAST AWARD WINNERS

PARTNER OF THE YEAR

HALL HUNGER INITIATIVE
AGRARIA CENTER FOR REGENERATIVE PRACTICE
B-W GREENWAY COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
WRIGHT MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY
CO-OP DAYTON, GEM CITY MARKET
BRUKNER NATURE CENTER
WARREN SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
YSI – XYLEM
MIAMI VALLEY LEAVE NO CHILD INSIDE
UPPER RIVER FUND
GLEN HELEN & TECUMSEH LAND TRUST PARTNERSHIP
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
BEAVERCREEK WETLANDS ASSOCIATION
AULLWOOD AUDUBON CENTER AND FARM
HAMILTON SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



INDIVIDUAL OF THE YEAR

CHRISTA WHEELER	DAVID FISHER
RHETT RHORER	WILLIAM "BILL" SCHIEMAN
GAIL PLUNKETT	JIM MASON
MICHELLE COMER	TERRY LAVY
GAYLE COVINGTON FOWLER	STEVEN MACKELL
JENNIFER WENTZEL	TERRY STALEY
MATTHEW LAWSON	ALEXIS FAUST
AARON ROURKE	MEREDITH FLORKEY
CALVIN CONRAD	JESS EVANS
LARRY FRIMERMAN	

PAST AWARD WINNERS

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR

OLD NORTH DAYTON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
MCCOOK FIELD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
CITY OF FAIRBORN
CITY OF DAYTON
VILLAGE OF YELLOW SPRINGS
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
MIAMI VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
WARREN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

JO GRANZOW	JUNE DRIELING
JEAN BINDEMAN	MARVIN OLINSKY
BOB JURICK	MARY KLUNK
DAVE NOLIN	GEORGE BIERI
RALPH DULL	JIM SCHNEIDER
DAN JACKSON	CHARLIE SHOEMAKER
(POSTHUMOUS)	ELLIS JACONS
BARBARA RION	SALLY KEYS
IRV BIESER	JEAN RYAN
CHARITY KRUEGER	DOUGLAS "DUSTY" HALL
JIM AMON	TOM ALLEN
JULIA CADY	KRISTA MAGAW
DANE MUTTER	DANSEN BROWN
DON GEIGER	HOPE TAFT

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE

Suds & Buds Fundraiser

October 15, 2026 | 5:30 - 8:30 PM
Fifth Street Brewpub – Dayton, Ohio

A portion of the proceeds benefits Partners for the Environment!



GREATER DAYTON
PARTNERS FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT



LOCAL ARTIST



**THIS YEAR'S AWARDS ARE VASES
MADE BY SARAH RICHARD,
POTTER AND LOCAL BUSINESS
OWNER, OF MADE STUDIO & SHOP
ON WAYNE AVE. IN DAYTON**

**SARAH IS A UNIVERSITY OF
DAYTON ALUMNUS AND MEMBER
OF THE 2019 RIVER'S INSTITUTE
RIVER STEWARD COHORT.**