



We All Need Friends...

Stories, Stewardship and Support of Hocking Hills State Park

FALL 2026

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Field Notes ...from the Executive Director

Friends Create Community

The photograph below, for me, captures something important about Hocking Hills.

It was taken outside the Campground Store with members of the Hocking Hills State Park team. There's nothing particularly ceremonial about it – no ribbon cutting, no oversized check, no special occasion. Just a few of the people whose work, day after day, helps make this extraordinary place what it is.

And perhaps that's exactly why I like it.

During my first few months with Friends of Hocking Hills State Park, I've had the opportunity to spend time with an incredible collection of people who care deeply about this place: Park staff and naturalists, business owners and tourism professionals, community leaders and volunteers, educators, astronomers, photographers, donors, members – and people who simply love coming here.

They represent different roles, different organizations, and different reasons for being involved. But they all share a remarkably common purpose.

We talk a lot about community in this issue of *We All Need Friends*. And in Hocking Hills, community means more than the towns and neighborhoods surrounding the Park. It is also the network of people and organizations that recognize something special here and choose to play a part in protecting, sharing and strengthening it.

You'll meet some of them in the pages ahead. You'll see how our tourism partners help introduce millions of visitors to the region and encourage them to experience it responsibly. You'll see how local institutions contribute to the character and vitality of the community. You'll hear from the people who care for Hocking Hills State Park itself, discover what our naturalists are teaching visitors about the world around them, and look skyward with our Friends at the John Glenn Astronomy Park. Each story is different. Together, they reveal something larger.

Places like Hocking Hills don't thrive because of the work of one organization. They thrive because people choose to care for them together. That idea is increasingly important as millions of people continue to discover Hocking Hills each year. More visitors bring tremendous opportunities – but they also bring greater responsibility. Preserving the experiences we treasure requires collaboration, stewardship and a community willing to invest its time, talents and resources.

That's where Friends comes in. **Our role is not to stand apart from this community, but to help strengthen its connections – to build relationships, support the people doing the work, create opportunities for others to participate, and help turn an appreciation for Hocking Hills into meaningful stewardship.**

And after my first few months here, one thing has become abundantly clear: There are a lot of people who love this place. Our job is to bring them together.

Because when it comes to preserving places we love, one thing remains true:
We All Need Friends.



Chris Schweitzer
Executive Director
Friends of Hocking Hills State Park

Keep up with the latest media coverage and updates by following us online and through our social channels:
www.friendsofhockinghills.org |   

If you prefer to receive this newsletter digitally instead of mail, please contact me: chris@friendsofhockinghills.org

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Founded in 2003 by a group of passionate volunteers, FHHSP works in close partnership with park staff and regional stakeholders to enhance visitor experiences, fund educational programming, and protect the park's natural resources.

COMMUNITY Connections

People, Partnerships, and Places around the Hills

A favorite downtown tradition brings businesses, families and neighbors together for the season.

The First Saturday in December is Always Busy in Logan

Each year, the Hocking Hills Chamber of Commerce organizes the Logan Christmas Parade, bringing businesses, organizations, schools, churches, families – and plenty of familiar faces – downtown for one of the community's favorite holiday traditions.

Part of the fun is simply seeing who shows up and what they've dreamed up this year.

Businesses and organizations build floats. Vehicles get transformed for Christmas. Groups gather to walk the route. Local businesses help sponsor the event. And before long, downtown Logan is lined with people waiting for the parade to arrive.

But the parade is only the beginning.

Make a Day Of It

Once the final float passes, Christmas continues throughout Logan.

Visitors can take in the grand opening of the Celebration of Trees at the Bowen House, catch a Christmas movie at the newly reopened Logan Theater, explore other activities around town, do a little holiday shopping, stop for lunch or dinner at a local restaurant—and perhaps find something warm to drink along the way.

Together, those experiences turn one parade into something bigger: a day spent enjoying the community itself. And that's what makes the Logan Christmas Parade special.

It isn't just something to watch. ***It's something our community participates in.***

You see people you know. Businesses get involved. Kids get excited. Families line the streets. And for a few hours, downtown fills with neighbors and visitors celebrating the season together.

Christmas COMES TO LOGAN



The Logan Christmas Parade takes place each year on the first Saturday in December.

Come watch. Build a float. Walk the route. Sponsor the parade.

Or simply spend the day experiencing Christmas in Logan.



Learn more about the Chamber, upcoming events, membership opportunities, and Commerce Collective, by visiting our website: hockinghillschamber.com.

A PLACE We All Share

...from Explore Hocking Hills

At Explore Hocking Hills, we believe tourism is at its best when it strengthens the entire community. Our work isn't simply about encouraging people to visit. It's about inviting them to appreciate what makes this place extraordinary, help protect it, and engage intentionally with the people and businesses that make Hocking Hills such a welcoming destination.

Tourism is about more than visiting Hocking Hills.

It's about caring for the land, supporting the people who call it home, and *becoming part of the community* while you're here.

Protecting the Place We Share

Hocking Hills is home to an extraordinarily fragile and biodiverse landscape. With the privilege of welcoming nearly six million visitors comes a responsibility to help ensure this special environment is protected for generations to come.

That's why responsible tourism is an important part of how we communicate with our guests.

Visitors are encouraged to stay on designated trails, respect wildlife and plant life, properly dispose of waste, follow park guidelines, and recognize that even seemingly small actions can affect a sensitive ecosystem.

But responsible travel extends beyond environmental stewardship. Hocking Hills isn't simply a destination.

It's a community.

"We ask our visiting guests to walk softly on the land and show up intentionally in the community that we call home."

– Heather Eddy, Executive Director
Explore Hocking Hills

Explore Hocking Hills members are an essential part of that experience. Collectively, they form a community of hosts who welcome guests and help visitors experience the region in thoughtful, meaningful ways. They're ambassadors not only for their individual businesses, but for Hocking Hills as a whole.

Community is Our Greatest Strength

Tourism can be measured in overnight stays, visitor spending and economic impact. But its true value is ultimately about people.

Every interaction creates an opportunity for connection: a lodging owner recommending a locally owned restaurant; an attraction sharing the story of Hocking Hills; a shopkeeper welcoming a first-time visitor; a guest leaving a trail exactly as they found it; or a visitor discovering a local business and returning year after year.

Explore Hocking Hills works to foster that sense of shared responsibility – helping guests leave not only with wonderful memories, but with a deeper appreciation for the land and the people who call it home.

"When residents, local businesses, community members and visitors form a positive connection, tourism becomes more than an economic engine. It becomes a force for stewardship, investment and belonging." – Heather Eddy



That is the power of community – and how we help ensure the Hocking Hills we love today remains extraordinary for generations to come.

TOURISM that *gives back...*

 **\$179** annual
MILLION visitor
spending

 **\$2M** through the EHH
INVESTED Destination
Investment
Fund

 **\$1974**
equivalent
PUBLIC-SERVICE
VALUE per Household in
Hocking County

 **\$13**
MILLION
sales + lodging
TAX REVENUE

**A great place to visit should also be
a great place to live.**



A PLACE for Stories

The Logan Theater returns as a gathering place for **arts, history and community.**



For generations, places like the Logan Theater have been more than buildings. They are where communities gather – where stories are shared, memories are made, and neighbors experience something together.

Today, one of downtown Logan's most recognizable landmarks is once again filling that role.

Following years of work, planning and community support, the historic Logan Theater has reopened as the **Logan Theater Community Arts Center**, beginning a new chapter for a place deeply connected to the history of Logan and Hocking County.

Its restored marquee once again lights Main Street, but what is happening inside may be even more important.

The theater has returned as a place for movies, live performances, music, community programs and special events – a space where residents and visitors can gather around experiences that celebrate creativity and connection.

That makes the Logan Theater's revival about more than preserving an old building. It is about preserving the role that gathering places play in healthy communities.

A Brief History...

Construction began in 1925 on a building designed to serve two purposes: as a fraternal lodge for the Knights of Pythias and as an entertainment venue for the community. On November 1, 1926, the theater officially opened its doors to a capacity crowd for its first films, *Jolly Tars* and *The Campus Flirt*.

In the 1930s, the theater was purchased by the Chakeres family, becoming part of the Chakeres Theatres circuit that operated throughout Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky. Generations of moviegoers passed beneath its marquee, and a major refurbishment in 1965 brought new seating and updates to the theater.

But like many historic downtown movie houses, changing times eventually took their toll. By the late 1980s attendance had declined. After several changes in ownership, the Logan Theater closed in 1992 following a final showing of *Unforgiven*.

For more than two decades, the theater sat vacant.

THE SHOW GOES ON



A Landmark Reclaimed

There were attempts to revive the building over the years, but its real return began taking shape after Logan Town Center purchased the property in August 2018. The following spring, ownership was transferred to Logan Theater, Inc., a nonprofit organization created to breathe life back into the historic landmark.

What followed was not simply a renovation, but an act of community preservation.

Major improvements have included accessibility upgrades, updated fire-suppression systems, renovation of the main auditorium, preservation of the upper floors for community use, and a new marquee thoughtfully designed to honor the one that once illuminated downtown Logan.

Today, those lights are shining again.

Audiences have returned to the seats. Films are back on the screen. Musicians and performers are taking the stage. **And the Logan Theater is beginning a new chapter as the Logan Theater Community Arts Center – a home for film, live performance, arts education and community gatherings.**



A building can be restored.

A marquee can be relit.



But a place truly returns when people return to it.



For a region known around the world for its extraordinary natural places, the Logan Theater offers another reminder that stewardship takes many forms. **Protecting what makes Hocking County special also means preserving the places, traditions and stories that connect the people who call it home.**

Local History Takes the Stage The Last Canal Boat

Long before highways carried residents and visitors through Hocking County, the Hocking Canal helped move people and goods through the region and connected local communities to a much larger transportation network.

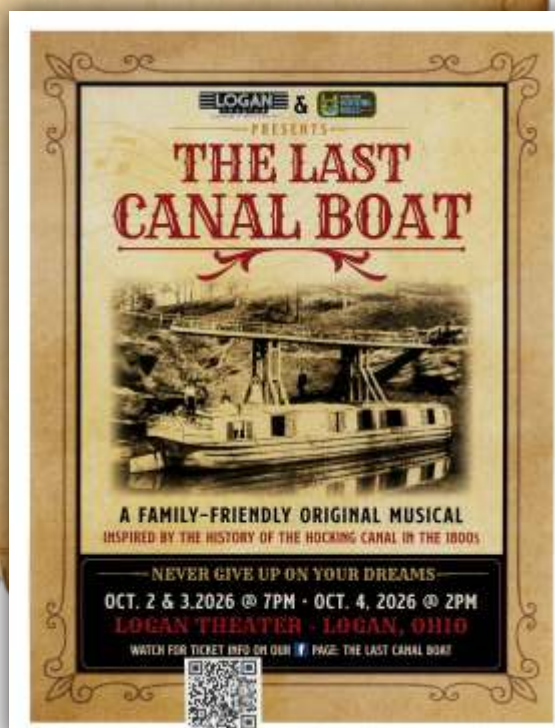
This fall, that chapter of local history comes to life inside the newly reopened Logan Theater. The Last Canal Boat is an original, family-friendly historical musical written by Jeff and Kathy Crisler and set during the canal era of the late 1800s. Framed through the memories of an old canal worker, the story follows young Abigail "Abby" Fletcher, a spirited girl determined to become a canal boat captain despite the expectations of her time. Along the way, the story explores friendship, family, changing times and a way of life beginning to disappear as railroads replace the waterways.

Fittingly, the musical's own story is tied to the rebirth of the Logan Theater. Jeff and Kathy began writing it in 2019 as a way to draw attention to fundraising for the theater's renovation. Portions were performed in 2021 and 2022 while work continued. The production was eventually completed – and then waited along with the community for the theater itself to be ready.

Now, for the first time, the complete musical will take the stage in the very theater it helped people imagine reopening.

Featuring original music, a live pit orchestra and a local cast of adults, children and young performers, The Last Canal Boat is more than a story about Hocking County.

It is a story created here, performed here, and brought to life by the community whose history it celebrates.



Community is at the heart of everything we do at Hocking Hills State Park. It is reflected in the millions of visitors who come to experience the trails, waterfalls, caves and forests each year. But it is also found among the people who work here – and in the many ways our staff carries the spirit of Hocking Hills beyond the boundaries of the Park.

This summer offered plenty of reminders that being part of the Hocking Hills community means much more than simply welcoming people when they arrive.

The Team Behind the Trails

Hocking Hills State Park is fortunate to have an incredible team that keeps everything running smoothly.

Our retail and campground staff greet visitors, answer questions and help people make the most of their time.

Our law enforcement officers help keep visitors and staff safe, often while covering multiple parks.

Our management team works hard to support employees and keep the many moving parts of one of Ohio's busiest parks working together.

And, of course, there are the naturalists – the “fun-havers” of the group!

Through guided hikes, educational programs, crafts, outdoor skills, archery and plenty of hands-on exploration, our naturalist team helps visitors discover that there is always something new to learn about Hocking Hills.

Together, all of these people create the experience visitors know as Hocking Hills State Park. Different jobs. Different responsibilities. One team caring for one extraordinary place.

B E Y O N D THE TRAILHEAD

How Our Staff Builds Community



Our maintenance crews work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep the Park beautiful and safe, including clearing hazardous trees following challenging weather.

Beyond the Park

Our sense of community doesn't stop at the Park entrance.

This summer, members of our team traveled throughout the region and across Ohio to share a little bit of Hocking Hills with people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience it.

Naturalist Cameron Manz traveled to Ohio Tourism Day at the Statehouse with Houdini, our great horned owl, giving visitors an opportunity to learn about Ohio wildlife and the work taking place in our parks.

Cameron and Naturalist Gwen McCreery also represented Hocking Hills at the Ohio State Fair, where Park staff and members of our management team helped with exhibits, activities and the popular kayak pond. Gwen brought a raptor program to the Athens County Fair, while I had the opportunity to bring one of our programs closer to home during Logan's Last Blast Block Party.

Whether we're at the Statehouse, a county fair or right here in downtown Logan, these opportunities allow us to meet people where they are and introduce them to the natural resources we work every day to protect.

If everyone can't come to the Park, sometimes the Park can come to them.

Growing the Next Generation

Some of our favorite opportunities involve introducing young people to the natural world.

Cameron and I hosted a Herpetology Day at the Hocking Hills Children's Museum, where young visitors got an up-close look at some of Ohio's amphibians and reptiles. Natural Resource Worker Dr. Remington Burwell also shared his knowledge of wildlife and conservation during a Boy Scouts of America camp day in Newark.

Experiences like these are about much more than meeting an animal or learning a new fact. They create curiosity. They help young people understand the natural world around them. And, hopefully, they begin a relationship with the outdoors that lasts a lifetime.

Today's curious child may become tomorrow's hiker, volunteer, naturalist – or steward of the places we all love.

Community, Wherever We Go

Our team participates in events throughout the year because we believe parks are more than places on a map. They are part of the communities they serve.

Every program, conversation and shared experience is another opportunity to strengthen that connection – to help someone discover something new, develop a greater appreciation for Ohio's natural resources, or simply feel a little more connected to Hocking Hills.

And as summer gives way to fall, we're looking forward to one of the most beautiful – and busiest – times of the year.

Whether we see you along a trail, at the Visitor Center, during a naturalist program or somewhere beyond the trailhead, we hope you'll say hello.

After all, you're part of this community, too.



UNDER OHIO'S Dark Skies

by Brad Hoehne, Director of JGAP

A journey through the fall sky—from a nearby Sun-like star to light that began traveling toward us millions of years ago.

Many questions come up time and again during programs at the John Glenn Astronomy Park.

"What is that light in the west?"
(Probably Venus.)

"What telescope should I buy?"
(Don't get one yet. Start with the binoculars you already have in the closet.)

And, surprisingly often: *"How far can you see?"*

For us astro-nerds sharing the universe with JGAP's visitors, the question seems a little goofy at first. Light doesn't simply stop. Unless it runs into something, a particle of light—a photon—will keep plowing along. So the knee-jerk answer is:

HOWEVER FAR YOU WANT!

But there's more to it. We know from everyday experience that light appears fainter the farther away it is. A car's headlights may look like tiny flecks as it crests a distant hill, but painfully bright when it gets close.

Astronomers call this the inverse square law. Put simply, if a light moves twice as far away, it appears only one-fourth as bright. Move it three times farther away, and it appears one-ninth as bright.

Even something enormously bright – like our Sun – eventually disappears from view.

Without a telescope or binoculars, our Sun would fade from sight if it were somehow moved just 60 light-years from Earth. Through an eight-inch telescope, it could remain visible at roughly 1,800 light-years. Through JGAP's enormous 28-inch telescope, we'd still see it from about 6,000 light-years away.

But some objects are much brighter than our Sun.

how FAR can you SEE?

"The universe is enormous. And the part we can see with our unaided eyes is only a small piece of all that is there."

2,600 Light-Years — DENEĀ

Still high in the western sky on fall evenings, Deneb is nearly 200,000 times as bright as our Sun. That extraordinary brightness allows us to see it with our own eyes from roughly 2,600 light-years away.

7,500 Light-Years — THE DOUBLE CLUSTER

Look toward Perseus and you'll find the Double Cluster, a beautiful pair of star families that blooms into glittering jewels through binoculars or a small telescope.

The light reaching us tonight has been traveling through space for roughly 7,500 years – since humans were only beginning to live in cities.

2.5 Million Light-Years — ANDROMEDA

And then there's Andromeda. (Photo)

Under dark skies, our nearest large galactic neighbor appears as a faint, ghostly smudge. But the light reaching your eyes began its journey roughly 2.5 million years ago, when our not-quite-human ancestors were shorter, much hairier, and hadn't yet developed brains complex enough to appreciate that wondrous fact.

Those ancient photons are arriving here. *Tonight.*

See the universe for yourself. Explore upcoming programs at JGAP.info

PARTNERS in Stewardship

Working Together to Protect the Place We Love

When visitors come to Hocking Hills, they might stay in a cabin tucked deep in the woods, a local inn, a campground or one of the many unique properties found throughout the region. What they probably don't see is the community of people working behind the scenes to make those stays possible

The community of lodging owners, businesses and partners helping Hocking Hills welcome the world.

A Community Behind the Welcome

The Hocking Hills Lodging Owners Association brings that community together.

HHLOA members operate different kinds of properties and businesses, but they share many of the same challenges and goals. The association gives lodging owners a place to learn from one another, talk about changes in the industry, advocate for issues affecting their businesses and have a stronger voice in decisions that impact tourism throughout Hocking Hills.

And that community extends well beyond lodging owners.



Hospitality may begin at the front door. Community is what stands behind it.

That's the community HHLOA continues working to strengthen throughout Hocking Hills.



To learn more about HHLOA, upcoming events, or membership opportunities, visit www.hockinghillslodgingownersassociation.com. Or contact them directly: (740) 400-9141 hhlogeownersassociation@gmail.com

BEHIND EVERY STAY

A Bigger Tourism Community

HHLOA's allied partners provide many of the services and resources that keep the local lodging industry moving – from contractors and suppliers to marketing professionals and other businesses throughout the region.

Together, they form a network that helps support not only individual properties, but the broader visitor experience.

Throughout the year, HHLOA creates opportunities to strengthen those connections through Mix & Mingles, the Allied Partner Fair, Tourism Trends Symposium and Conservation Coalition. Some provide education. Others create opportunities for networking and collaboration. And sometimes the value is simply having the chance to sit down with people who understand the industry and talk. Because running a lodging business can sometimes feel like you're on your own – especially when your property is miles from the next one. *But you're part of something much larger.*



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We All Need Friends...

Friends of Hocking Hills State Park exists to support and sustain one of Ohio's most treasured natural places.

The mission of Friends of Hocking Hills State Park is to foster a supportive partnership with Hocking Hills State Park, its visitors, and the region – preserving our natural treasures for the education and enjoyment of all.

As Ohio's most visited state park, welcoming more than five million visitors annually, **Hocking Hills depends on strong community support.** With no entrance or parking fees and limited state funding, FHHSP plays a critical role in providing resources that help maintain the park's beauty, safety, and accessibility.



100% of contributions made to Friends of Hocking Hills State Park **DIRECTLY SUPPORT THE PARK.**

Friends of Hocking Hills State Park is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Your support is tax deductible.

