

# DONOR NEWSLETTER

July & August 2024



Congratulations,  
Nick Grimes & Laura Basciotta!

Laura's plaque on her Allegheny Commons bench reads: "To Laura: From Pittsburgh to Paris, all I want is to sit next to you."



## A Proposal in the Commons

Photo Credit: Emily Kriley, @emilykrileyphoto

Walking along the paved trails in Pittsburgh's parks, you'll encounter benches that tell many stories. Here's one of our recent favorites:

**Meet Nick:** a 25-year-old living in Pittsburgh's historic Northside. Originally from New Jersey, Nick moved to Pittsburgh in 2017 to study business at the University of Pittsburgh. That's where he met his sweetheart, Laura.

Following graduation, Nick and Laura moved to an apartment on Beech Avenue, blocks away from Allegheny Commons. So began the start of a beautiful relationship between the couple and their neighborhood park.

Nick and Laura have a loop—taking in Lake Elizabeth over pedestrian bridges, strolling past the Aviary, and continuing down the promenade parallel to West North Avenue. When Nick noticed that the Parks Conservancy was leading a new construction project along the North Promenade, he reached out about bench naming opportunities. Could he use this new chapter for Allegheny Commons to mark a new beginning for his relationship, too?

His friends didn't understand his proposal plan at first. Nick and Laura were about to take their first international trip together. Why not Paris, the most romantic city in the world? But Nick's decision to propose at Allegheny Commons was swift and unwavering. The location felt as natural as his feelings for Laura.

In December 2023, Nick began working with the Parks Conservancy to reserve Laura's bench. "Lots of thought went into it on both ends. The team even helped with the surprise element, timing the installation and even covering the plaque leading up to the big day."

Fast-forward to a rainy Saturday in April:



To start a conversation about a bench dedication, email Elizabeth at [emick@pittsburghparks.org](mailto:emick@pittsburghparks.org). More information can also be found at [pittsburghparks.org/benches](http://pittsburghparks.org/benches).

The couple began their usual route through the Commons, heading towards their favorite restaurant, 40 North, for a dinner reservation. Little did Laura know she'd come across a bench of her own.

“As a little girl, I always imagined what it would look like to one day be in love, get engaged and get married. Nick absolutely exceeded my vision for a proposal. I tear up just thinking about it! We love this neighborhood. Allegheny Commons is a constant for us, in every season. It will always be part of our love story.”

The happy couple is aiming to tie the knot on October 24, 2026 — their seven-year anniversary. "No doubt it will be in Pittsburgh," Laura wrote.



Explore professional photos of the newly renovated North Promenade [here!](#)

# Growing Together:

## How Generational Giving is Cultivating Pittsburgh's Parks for the Future

Kay Fleischner returned to her family's Squirrel Hill home after graduating from Boston's Northeastern University in May. Her affinity for the outdoors led to a niche opportunity during her senior year: a cooperative education placement supporting the 11.5-acre arboretum on campus.

A sociology major, Kay took a deep dive into the world of **dendrology** (the study of trees) and the technology that's transforming horticultural practices right here in Pittsburgh, too. Her team's responsibilities included tagging new trees and shrubs with unique ID numbers, managing the arboretum's plant database, and creating educational content for the arboretum's social media platform.

Kay's interest in trees began when the Fleischner family moved from Los Angeles to Pittsburgh in 2009. Kay was seven years old and loved exploring the greenery of Pittsburgh's parks, especially the trails off main pathways. **In a formative memory orchestrated through the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC),** Kay presented her seventh-grade teachers with an unusual Christmas gift: a commemorative tree would be planted in their honor for PPC's Earth Day event. She remembers giving unprepared remarks in front of a state senator and Pittsburgh's mayor before helping to plant the serviceberry in Frick Park.

Philanthropy was never a foreign concept to this twelve-year-old girl and her younger brother, Andrew. Their parents, Chris and Dawn Fleischner, have been building their lives around advocacy and service, with particular interest in expanding equity and inclusion in Pittsburgh's arts and education sectors.

"Chris and I have our own causes that motivate us," Dawn explained. "We're inspired to see what matters to our kids, and we find it important to be responsive to that."



**Dawn Fleischner with children Kay and Andrew**

To start, they encouraged Kay and Andrew to consider the needs of their community and find nonprofits whose missions aligned with their interests and skill sets. **Using "save-spend-donate" as a budgeting motto,** the siblings were accustomed to making annual holiday donations, always matched by their parents.

"There's a lot that Kay and Andrew learned on their own. Becoming more involved builds character, and Pittsburgh is full of opportunity," Dawn remarked. "You truly get what you give. Why wouldn't I want to pass this on to my children?"

Philanthropy brought the Fleischner family back to Frick Park in May for the Parks Conservancy's groundbreaking ceremony of the **Outdoor Sensory Classroom and Nature Play Trail.** Chris and Dawn had always been drawn to the space, having supported the rebuilding of the Frick Environmental Center (FEC) in 2016. The Outdoor Sensory Classroom was "a logical and delightful extension of that."

"I'm impressed with the project's community-driven design. It was very well researched," Dawn added. In its early stages, Parks Conservancy staff devoted meaningful time collecting input from accessibility advocates, groups serving individuals with disabilities, and individuals eager to take advantage of this new park asset.

The Fleischners especially look forward to seeing the finishing touches roll out this fall, such as the expansion of the FEC's lending library program. (Sensory-inclusive backpacks will soon be available, including fidget toys, weighted compression vests and neck wraps, and noise-canceling headphones.)

"The Outdoor Sensory Classroom couldn't have been a more perfect intersection of Kay's interests with the philanthropic values Chris and I share. Having her home to witness this project unfold together has been moving for all of us."

**Thank you to Dawn and Kay for sharing their park story!**

Work has already begun on the reconstruction of the observation deck and transformation of the Woodland Loop Trail into a 1/3-mile pathway that can truly accommodate any and all park visitors. Fundraising for the long-term care and programming for the space is ongoing. To read more about the Outdoor Sensory Classroom project, visit [pittsburghparks.org/sensoryclassroom](http://pittsburghparks.org/sensoryclassroom).

The Fleischner Family Charitable Foundation is one of several major sources of support for this project. We'd also like to recognize The Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust, the City of Pittsburgh, the City of Pittsburgh Parks Tax Trust Fund, Clearview Federal Credit Union, Leslie Fleischner, FISA Foundation, Massey Charitable Trust, Robert and Mary Weisbrod Foundation, and the Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation for their role in this exciting new space.



**Kay and her family, to the left of Mayor Ed Gainey, at the Outdoor Sensory Classroom's groundbreaking ceremony in May. Photo credit: Joe Riebling.**



## Creating a Culture of Philanthropy in Your Home

- Encourage your children to research local non-profits** that pique their interests and career aspirations. Then, have them make a next step, like making a small donation to begin receiving newsletters and updates.
- Start an annual giving tradition.** If you're able, consider matching your child's donation to a non-profit of their choice. Giving Tuesday is a popular time of year for this, kicking off the holiday season by shifting your family's focus away from consumerism.
- Inquire about committee opportunities** for young professionals. The PPC's Leadership Grove, still in its infancy, is a great opportunity to form connections, build resumes, and make a difference locally. Membership makes a great gift, too!
- Volunteer together.** They'll see firsthand how their time and skills can make a difference while building confidence, empathy, and valuable industry connections.



**In Recent News:** There are three nationally certified arboretums within Pittsburgh's parks: **Mellon Park** (2021), **Westinghouse Park** (2021), and **Riverview Park** (2024). To be recognized, a park must maintain professional practices at a nationally recognized standard. Qualifications include a committed governance group and a minimum of 25 tree species or cultivars.



**Kay and her fellow Arboretum co-op team plant a tree on Northeastern's campus following their May 2024 graduation. Photo credit: Northeastern University**

## Save the Date: 2024 Donor Appreciation Day

**Sunday, September 22, 2024, 3-5 p.m. | Schenley Park Visitor Center**



As a gesture of sincere thanks for your support, we invite your family to join us for Millie's ice cream, guided hikes along Panther Hollow trails, nature activities for kids of all ages, and a chance to meet our team. We hope to see you there!

Please register at [pittsburghparks.org/donorday](http://pittsburghparks.org/donorday)



# Your Generosity at Work in Local Schools

If you live near the Frick Environmental Center, you're accustomed to chaperoned groups of students journaling on park lawns and the bagel bird feeders they leave behind. **As supporters of our mission, you play an important role in the education programs we offer.** Here are a few updates you might find interesting:

## New Community Partnerships

In her first summer as our new Community Nature Educator, Elle Sauer traveled regularly to summer camps in Homewood, Hazelwood, and Beltzhoover-Hilltop—neighborhoods we are helping to revitalizing by activating park spaces. New partnerships with the **Oasis Project** in Homewood and **Voices Against Violence** in McKinley Park exemplify our commitment to expanding our impact through programming.

*Thank you to our Community Nature Education supporters: Birmingham Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh.*



**Voices Against Violence campers observing the molt of a tarantula during spider week.**



**Young Naturalists building nest boxes in Frick Park.**

## Internship Program Recognized with Governor's Award

In April, our education department was recognized with the prestigious Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for PPC's **Young Naturalists program**, which hit a record number of applications this year.

Every summer since 2014, this innovative internship program has opened doors for local high schoolers to explore green careers by learning from field experts and participating in stewardship projects that directly improve Pittsburgh's urban ecosystem. Some are in our streams, building check dams to control stormwater runoff; others are in our woodlands, installing fencing for ecologically sensitive sites.

One of our goals for this program is to reengage Young Naturalist alumni in service projects and track their impact following their experience with the Parks Conservancy.

*Thank you to our Young Naturalist program supporters: AEO Foundation, Arconic Foundation, Clearview Federal Credit Union, Pepsi, and Turner Construction.*

## Local Middle Schoolers Investigate Effects of Fern Hollow Bridge Collapse

In their final field trip of the school year, 350 middle schoolers returned to Frick Park to study the impact of the 2022 Fern Hollow Bridge collapse on the stream below as a real-world example of scientific inquiry. Their investigation involved identifying aquatic creatures in the stream and using watershed models to explore sources of pollution and potential green infrastructure solutions.



**Propel Braddock Hills Middle School students study local aquatic life in the Ecosystem Investigators field trip program.**

**Do you have children or grandchildren of this age? Encourage them to explore [pittsburghparks.org/eco-investigators](https://pittsburghparks.org/eco-investigators) for local content developed by our nature educators!**

*Thank you to the PPG Foundation, National Environmental Education Foundation, and Bosch Community Fund for their support of the Ecosystem Investigators program.*

## Send a Child to Summer Camp

In 2024, the PPC awarded 37 "camperships" for first-time and returning summer camp students in need of financial assistance. **Thank you** for making nature camps accessible to our future park stewards.

- \$36 - one day of Kinder Camp (ages 4-5)**
- \$64 - one day of Survival Camp (grades 7-8)**
- \$144 - one week of Kinder Camp (ages 4-5)**
- Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**



Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy does not solicit contributions from persons or entities in states other than Pennsylvania, New York, or Florida.

## QUESTIONS?

Contact Elizabeth Mick at [emick@pittsburghparks.org](mailto:emick@pittsburghparks.org) or 412.682.7275 ext. 240