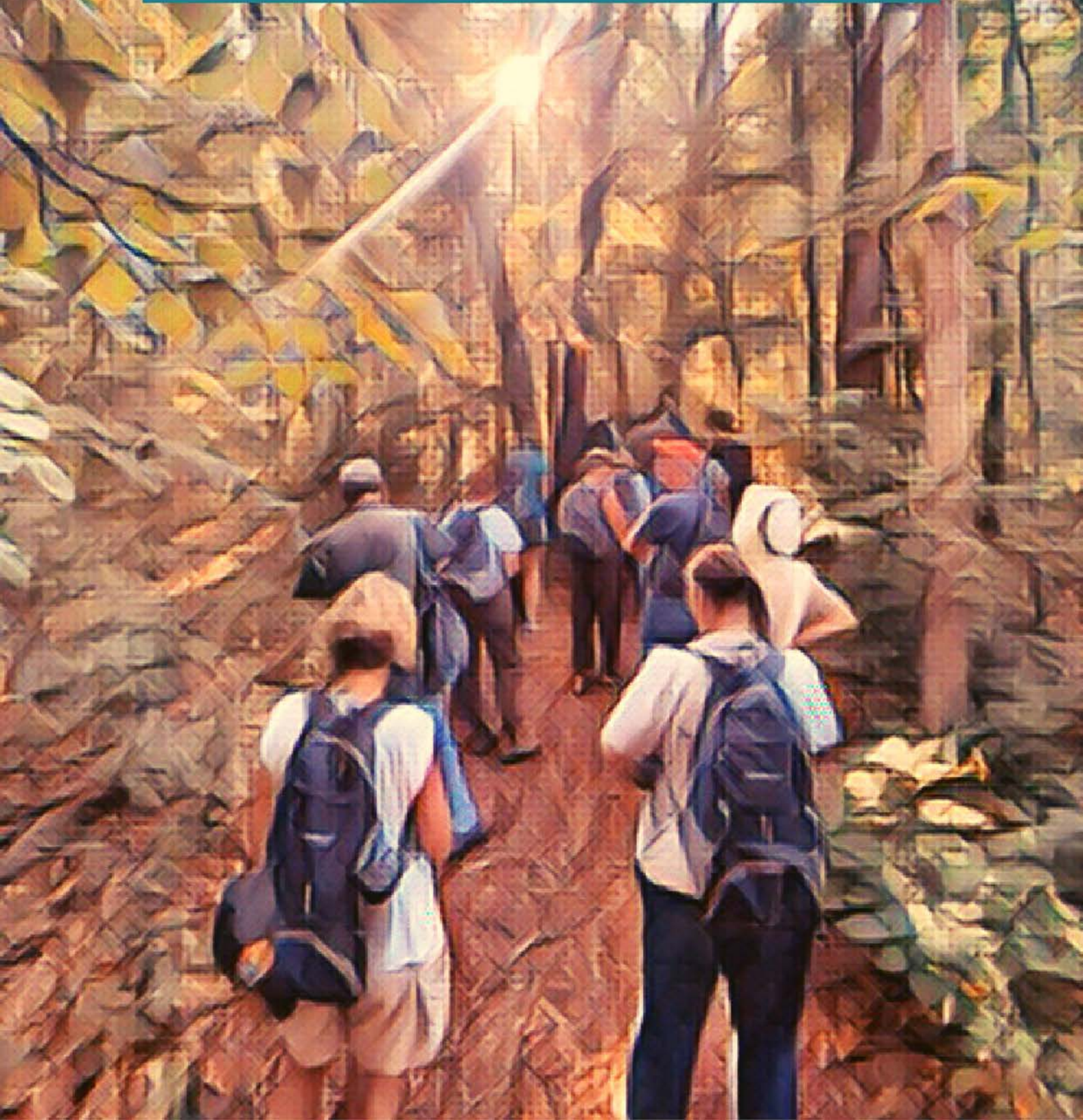




ELKHART COUNTY  
PARKS

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022





# PARKS & PLACES

## MISSION

INSPIRING CONNECTIONS with CULTURE and NATURE

## PARK BOARD

Larry Andrews  
Jeff Burbrink  
Karin Frey  
John P. Hardy

Karen Mackowiak  
Klaus Mueller  
William Wilson

## 2022 COUNTY COUNCIL

Randall Yohn  
Douglas Graham  
David Hess  
Adam Bujalski

Darryl Riegsecker  
Thomas Stump  
Steven Clark

## 2022 COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Suzanne Weirick  
Frank Lucchese

Brad Rogers

# YEAR IN REVIEW



We have **much to celebrate** once again in the Elkhart County Parks. The year 2022 was full of partnerships, programs, and projects that reached a diverse audience from across Elkhart County and beyond.

Some of the **exciting things** we offered included hosting the Miami of Oklahoma's "siihsipaahkwikaani" Maple Sugaring exhibit at the Elkhart County Historical Museum, our first ever bilingual movie night at Ox Bow County Park, and the construction of the first phase of an accessible trail at the upcoming Corson Riverwoods County Park.

Our motto is '**parks are for everyone**' and whether it is large family gathering at a Bonneyville Mill shelter, a mobility device on the Pumpkinvine Trail, or a quiet walk through the prairie at Boot Lake Nature Preserve to sooth the mind and soul, **we are here for you.**

Experience an Elkhart County Park facility today!

*Ronda DeCaire*

Ronda DeCaire  
Director

## Elkhart County Parks

211 W. Lincoln Ave.  
Goshen, IN 46526  
574-535-6458  
elkhartcountyparks.org

## Bonneyville Mill County Park

### Ox Bow County Park

### Cobus Creek County Park

### River Preserve County Park

### DeFries Gardens

### Boot Lake Nature Preserve

### Elkhart County Historical Museum

### Treasure Island County Park

### Wolf Lake

### Pumpkinvine Nature Trail

### MapleHeart Trail

### Six Span Boat Launch

Coming soon!

### Corson Riverwoods County Park



# 2022: BY THE NUMBERS

Bonneyville Mill:

**9,650 lbs flour**

Expanded OPEN hours by 4 weeks  
Now open mid-April to mid-November

## Preservation

Acres of Land: 1,303

Miles of Trails: 36

Historical Artifacts: 30,000

## Facility Rentals

2022: 470

2021: 439



KUM MOL R.E  
SHELTER

## Social Media Followers:

#ElkhartCountyParks

FACEBOOK: 9.4K

INSTAGRAM: 2.1K

## Popular Spaces

Ox Bow County Park:  
244,400 people

Pumpkinvine Nature Trail  
(County portion):  
17,488 walkers  
49,829 riders

Bonneyville Mill Visitors: 10,494

## Interpretation:

**36,247**

field trips, programs, special  
events, museum, and mill visitors

## 2022 Budget

	Budget	Spent
General (1219)		
Personnel	\$ 1,989,583.00	\$ 1,701,537.64
Services	\$ 103,550.00	\$ 94,768.38
Supplies	\$ 222,450.00	\$ 220,621.15
Equipment	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00
	\$ 2,360,583.00	\$ 2,061,927.17
Operating (1179)		
Services	\$ 46,700.00	\$ 32,793.76
Supplies	\$ 53,400.00	\$ 45,250.45
Equipment	\$ 17,000.00	\$ 13,781.22
	\$ 117,100.00	\$ 91,825.43
TOTALS:	\$ 2,477,683.00	\$ 2,153,752.60



# PLANTING SEEDS

## Development of New Park Begins

In late 2022, the first phase of the future Corson Riverwoods County Park located northwest of Middlebury was launched. The accessible trail base and sidewalk were complete before snow arrived. This 81.5 acre parcel was donated by the late Tom Corson in 2017. It was important to him to add "Riverwoods" to the name of the park as he envisioned a place for people to connect with the river and woodlands. In phase II, the site will feature a 'Pollinator Playpath' which will host four play pods along the trail system themed to learn about native pollinators and encourage families to 'move together' and explore. The site will be restored and planted with native prairie and tree species to create habitat for creatures such as the monarch butterfly.



Stay up-to-date  
via our website  
for information  
on when the  
park will open  
in 2023.

**Photo: An aerial view of the new  
trails as seen from a drone.**

## Corson Riverwoods Gifts & Grants

- Mr. Tom Corson
- Community Foundation of Elkhart County
- Bontrager Family Foundation
- Well Foundation
- READI Grant
- D. Afton Development, LLC
- Friends of the Elkhart County Parks
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Partners for Wildlife



# PLANTING SEEDS

Sponsors Help Grow Special Events

## Dogapalooza



A Connect in Elkhart County grant was used to purchase portable dog bowls at Dogapalooza for outings to park and trails!



## Major Gifts & Grants

### Special Event Sponsors:

Thor Industries  
Interra Credit Union  
Everence Financial  
Connect in Elkhart County-CFEC

### Projects & Programs:

Glenn Anderson Estate  
Rick & Mary Davis  
Ron Geyer  
Friends of the Elkhart County Parks  
Maurine Neterer Nature Fund  
Bristol Alumni Association  
Community Foundation of Elkhart County

### In Memory of Mark Rosser:

Victor & Karen Williams  
Kerm & Deb Garber  
Jack Van Diepenbos

### In Memory of John Jenney:

Courtney Franke, Andy Langdon, Lynn Matthews, Marlene Lantzer, Robyn Buenger, Will and Bobbie Wilson, Dan & Kathy Seltenright, Klaus Mueller, Ronda & Dave DeCaire, Larry Andrews, Karin Frey, Craig Kirkwood, Karen Mackowiak

### ENDOWMENTS

#### Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund:

Karen Mackowiak  
Mr. & Mrs. Dan Seltenright  
Community Foundation of Elkhart County  
(matched above gifts)

#### DeFries Gardens Endowment:

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Steury  
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Minnick  
Community Foundation of Elkhart County  
(matched above gifts)

#### In-Kind Donations

Dutchman RV - Native Landscaping Plants  
Polywood - Chairs at DeFries  
Veterinary & Poultry Supply, Kay Morford, & Martin's Supermarkets - Bird Feed  
Lakeland Athletic Club - Balls for Dog Event  
Mike's Fencing - Lumber  
Kercher's and Tammy Shidler - Pumpkins  
Carlos Negron-Screch Owl Boxes  
Troyer Carpet/Hoosier Hardwood-Carpet  
Rolls & Supplies

## Movie in the Park

Everence Financial sponsored the bilingual movie night at Ox Bow County Park.



## Halloween Hayrides



Thor Industries and Interra helped grow the Halloween Hayride event that attracted 2,000 people in 2022.



# PLANTING SEEDS

## Partnerships Sowed in the Community



The **Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau** sponsored a J. Seward Johnson sculpture entitled "Attic Trophy" featuring a little girl hula hooping near the Quilt Garden at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. The Quilt Mural at Bonneyville Mill continues to draw visitors. Several staff members were also guests on the ECCVB's 'People & Places' Podcasts.



**Michiana Master Gardeners** provide much care to the planting and maintaining of the quilt garden at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. The 2022 garden was entitled "Snowball in Summer."



Continued partnering with the **Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District**. The Elkhart County Parks assists with hosting and teaching some of the Indiana Master Naturalist classes. To date, more than 250 people have been trained through this adult service-learning program that began in 2007 and many have given their volunteer hours to the County Parks.



The **Bristol Alumni Association** funded the updating of the kitchen at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. Their assistance in this remodel is greatly appreciated.



Staff continue to work with our non-profit partners who support our projects and programs including the **Friends of the Pumpkinvine, Elkhart County Historical Society, Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association** and **Friends of the Elkhart County Parks**.



The Elkhart County Parks was represented on the **Upper Elkhart River Watershed Plan** with the **Elkhart River Restoration Association**. This community initiative looks at how we work, live, and play in the watershed and the best ways to keep it healthy.



The Department continues to partner with the **Indiana Department of Natural Resources** to care for Lieber Nature Preserve as well as helped the IDNR celebrate the grand opening of the Elkhart Bog on County Road 15.



The Department hosted its education booth at the **Elkhart County 4H Fair** which included the rental of a new building near the same location. The department reaches a diverse audience through its outreach at the fair.



Staff have been involved in the **Connect in Elkhart County** planning meetings and events; a movement via the **Community Foundation of Elkhart County** to create a sustainable trail network throughout Elkhart county.



We partnered with all the area libraries by offering a free Ox Bow Park pass to check out. In addition, the **Elkhart Public Library** gave away complimentary one-day passes to Ox Bow during their Summer Reading Program.



Staff assisted **LaCasa and Momentum Marketing** with planning and implementing the Elkhart River Challenge.



The Elkhart County Historical Museum partnered with the **Goshen Theater** to showcase a double feature of Howard Hawks films. Hawks was a native of Goshen who directed films and was nominated for an Academy Award.



# PRESERVATION OF SPACES

## **Paddle Launch added to Six Span**

The Elkhart County Commissioners and the Redevelopment Commission supported the construction of a new accessible paddle launch east of the Six Span bridge boat dock. The new launch will help activate the river and give more access to citizens. This is a great takeout site for those paddling from Mottville or Bristol.



## **Native Bee Survey at Boot Lake**

Boot Lake Nature Preserve was part of a statewide IDNR/USFWS native bee survey at state dedicated nature preserves throughout Indiana. Scientists are monitoring bee species throughout the state to identify rare or endangered pollinators in Indiana.

## **Prairie Burns Maintain Native Plants**

Staff and contractors maintain native forbs and grasses in the prairie at Boot Lake Nature Preserve. These controlled burns reduce invasive and unwanted species in these specialized habitats which are home to ground-nesting birds such as the Grasshopper Sparrow and other rare species.



## **Wetland Education Boardwalk**

The floating boardwalk was replaced at Ox Bow County Park with a grant from the Community Foundation of Elkhart as well as donations in memory of Catherine Metzger and Aaron Drolet. Thousands of visitors, including school children, will continue to learn about wetlands along this boardwalk.

## **Keene Bridge Rebuilt at River Preserve**

A footbridge was replaced at the River Preserve County Park. Staff worked together as a team from throughout the department to complete this project.





# PRESERVATION OF SPACES

## New Bird Feeding Station at Ox Bow

The friends and family of Robert E. Miller wanted to do something for Ox Bow, a favorite place for their beloved relative who passed away. More than \$2,000 was raised and a bench and custom-made bird feeding station was installed.



## Cobus Viewing Platform Rebuilt

The river viewing platform at Cobus Creek County Park was replaced by staff. Visitors can use this comfortable space to read a book or observe wildlife at the park.

## Control Gate Replaced at Bonneyville

A much needed repair was made to the control gates at Bonneyville Mill County Park. These important structures help maintain proper water levels that power the mill to grind flour.



## Restroom Planning Underway

ARPA funds were awarded by the County Commissioners and Council to replace restrooms. Throughout the Elkhart County Parks, soil surveys were completed and engineering began for the planning of new bathrooms. Look for the accessible restroom project to be complete by the end of 2024.

## Bike Repair Station on Pumpkinvine

A bike repair station along with a bench was installed on the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail. A big thank you to the Friends of the Pumpkinvine and community for these important contributions for trail users.





# PEOPLE & PROGRAMS

## Field Trips: Interpretive Naturalists Reach Thousands of Students



One of the most important things staff do is teach children about the place they live through natural and cultural history programs. **This past season the interpretive naturalist team led programs for 6,086 children, parents, and teachers.** Public, private, and homeschool classes are scheduled through office staff for all seven districts. Visits to the various parks happens on almost a daily basis in the fall and spring.

### 2022 Virtual Connections:

- EC History in 60 Podcasts
- Virtual Photo Contest
- Nature A to Z completed
- Virtual Stories of Elkhart County
- Museum Collections Tournament
- Hometown Living Guests

## Programs Remain Popular with Public

Interpretation staff hosted **175 public programs and special events** throughout 2022 at the Museum, Mill, and throughout the various County Parks. Popular programs included St. Patrick's Day Scavenger Hunt, Pancake Breakfasts, Cast Iron Cooking & Swap Meet, Adventure Bike Camp, Halloween Hayrides, and Holiday at the Mill.



### Indiana Historical Society Loans Scanner to Museum

In 2022 the Indiana Historical Society loaned the Elkhart County Historical Museum a large format book scanner.

Collections volunteers and staff were trained how to use the equipment in order to archive hundreds of large sized files.



## Donations are Power-ful!

Visitors often give back to the Mill by tucking a few dollars into the donation box. These funds are then used to improve interpretation and projects at the Mill. This year a specialized miniature turbine was custom-made to give more educational value to programs on how the mill is powered using water. Thank you to all who place donations in the boxes throughout the department!

## Citizen Science Offered

The Elkhart County Parks offers several opportunities each year for citizens to help gather information that contributes to local and national scientific databases. Stats in 2022 include:

- **Elkhart County Christmas Bird Count:**
  - 68 volunteers
  - 81 different species
  - 22,100 birds in one day
- **Parks for Pollinators Bioblitz:**
  - 45 participants
  - 130 different species of plants & pollinators in Elkhart County
- **Spring Birding Challenge:**
  - 7 teams = 30 people
  - 154 species
- **Bluebird Box Monitoring:**
  - 5 volunteers
  - 82 boxes
  - 56+ fledged birds

Look for new opportunities in 2023 at [elkhartcountyparks.org](http://elkhartcountyparks.org).

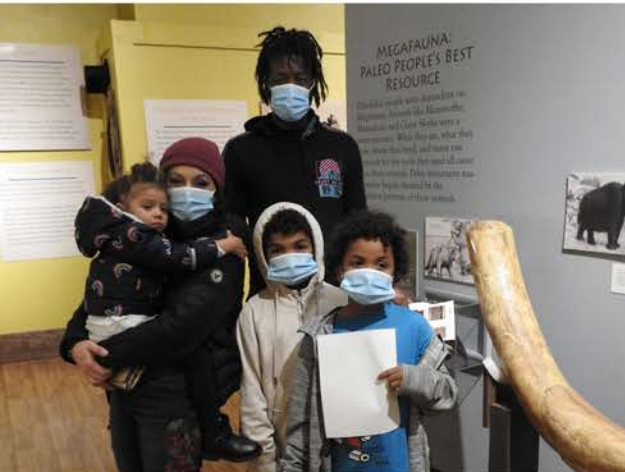




# PEOPLE & PROGRAMS

## Friday Evenings at the Museum

The Elkhart County Historical Museum staff expanded their open hours on Friday evenings periodically in 2022 offering hands-on activities and experiences for visitors based upon a special theme each night.



## Miami Maple Sugaring Exhibit Visits Museum

A traveling exhibit from the Myaamia Heritage Museum titled "sihsipaahkwikaani" was on loan for six months. More than 765 people visited the Elkhart County Historical Museum during that time to learn about the Miami people's past and present process of maple sugaring.



## Revenue Increases at Mill

Bonneyville Mill takes visitors back in time, but modern ways of selling flour and souvenirs have recently been implemented. A point of sales software with the ability to use credit cards, introduction of a new pancake mix, and expansion of open hours by a month have increased sales by 84.6% compared to 2019.



## John Jenney Memorial

In memory of John Jenney, former Mill Manager, staff planted a tree and installed an engraved millstone in front of Bonneyville Mill. Family, staff, former co-workers and community gathered in his memory during a ceremony after the spring Pancake Breakfast.



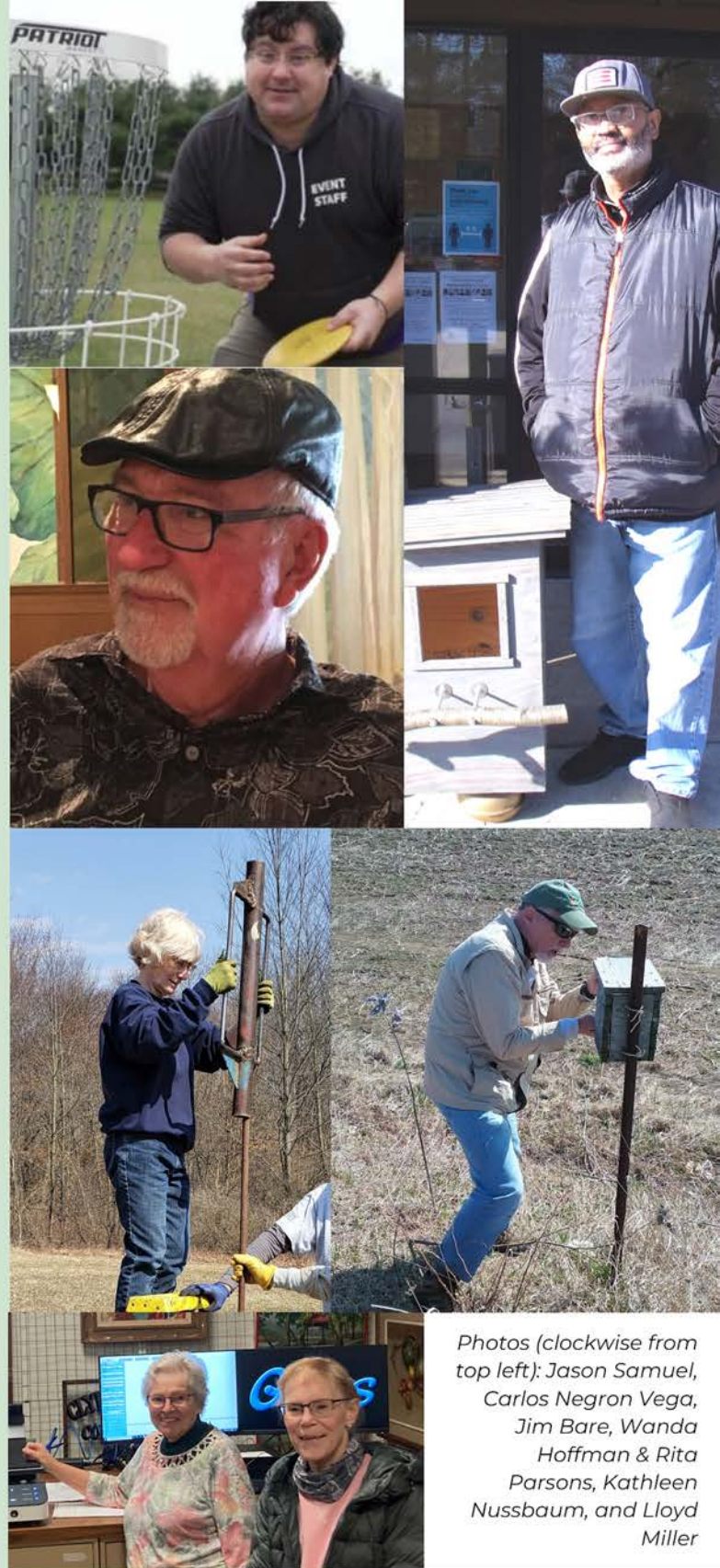


# VIBRANT VOLUNTEERS

- Jason Samuel, an avid disc golfer and advocate for Ox Bow's historical course assists in planning disc golf events that benefit the entire community. The Ice Bowl Disc Golf Tournament raised more than \$20,000 for a local food pantry in 2022 and next on his list is helping to raise funds for improvements to the Flying Disc Sanctuary this coming year.
- Carlos Negron Vega continues to maintain and repair Barred Owl nest boxes in the parks. We appreciate his enthusiasm for these raptors and admire his newfound photography skills of feathered friends.
- Jim Bare is a bluebird box monitor at the River Preserve County Park and assists with park maintenance as well. In 2022 he gave 68 hours of time to the park & birds.
- Wanda Hoffman and Rita Parsons spend dozens of hours documenting materials at the Elkhart County Historical Museum.
- Kathleen Nussbaum helps with making suet cakes for birds, installing bat and bluebird boxes, and bluebird monitoring at Boot Lake Nature Preserve.
- Lloyd Miller is a caring and compassionate leader as president of the Elkhart County Historical Society. We appreciate him giving back to the community in this partnering role with the Elkhart County Historical Museum.

Special thank you to ALL of our volunteers and volunteer organization partners.

*You are appreciated!*



Photos (clockwise from top left): Jason Samuel, Carlos Negron Vega, Jim Bare, Wanda Hoffman & Rita Parsons, Kathleen Nussbaum, and Lloyd Miller

**181**  
Volunteers

**2576+**  
Hours of service

**\$74,292\***  
Value of Volunteer Time

\*For Indiana as reported by the Independent Sector  
Note: not all volunteers or hours are tracked



# COUNTY PARKS STAFF

*A huge thank you to the hard-working team who served the community by keeping our historical facilities and parks at their best in 2022. You are much appreciated!*



## *Full-time Staff:*

Andy Langdon, Interpretive Naturalist  
Annie Aguirre, Marketing Coordinator  
Bernard Cunningham, Deputy Director of Operations  
Brian O'Connor, Park Services III  
Courtney Franke, Mill Manager  
Donny Aleo, Deputy Director of Interpretive Services  
Jason Woody, Park Services I  
John Monger, Park Services I  
Julia Parke, Museum Manager  
Krista Daniels, Interpretive Naturalist Manager  
Krystin Harrison, Park Services III  
Lynn Matthews, Park Services III  
Marlene Lantzer, Secretary  
Michelle Nash, Curator of Collections  
Miranda Pernel, Park Services II  
Natasha Tucker, Park Services I  
Nicholas Steele, Trail & Equipment Coordinator  
Patrick McGuire, Curator of Education  
Phelicia Jozwiak, Interpretive Naturalist  
Robyn Buenger, Bookkeeper  
Ronda DeCaire, Director  
Sherry Plank, Park Services III  
Traci Stickler, Park Services II  
Wilma Harder, Park Services I

## *Part-time/Seasonals:*

Adeline Russell, Seasonal Mill Attendant  
Alex Kaminsky, Park Services  
Bethany Goddard, Gate Attendant  
Brandon Blackmer, Mill Interpreter  
David Gall, Park Services I  
Edgardo Rosa, Park Services  
Ellen Morey, Visitor Services  
Eugene Duncan, Museum Maintenance  
Gary Rorie, Park Services  
James Maure, Park Services  
John Metz, Museum Maintenance  
Joni Decker, Gate Attendant  
Lamar Lawrence, Park Services  
Misty Geradot, Gate Attendant  
Paige Renshaw, Visitor Services  
Pam McCowan, Gate Attendant  
Patsy Pippenger, Gate Attendant  
Priscilla Hile, Seasonal Mill Attendant  
Ron Yoder, Park Services

## *DeFries Gardens Seasonals:*

Jon Cutrell, Garden Consultant  
Tesesa Klein, Garden Attendant  
Dala Bruemmer, Garden Attendant



**Jeff Burbrink, Park Board member recently accepted a position in a neighboring county. As the ex-officio Board Member, he dedicated more than 20+ years to the Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board. We thank him for his support, expertise, and wisdom through the decades.**

**Eugene Duncan retired from his role of maintenance at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. This is Gene's "second retirement" and we truly hope he is rewarded with many hours of relaxation.**



## SHARING KNOWLEDGE

*Staff shared their knowledge and gained new ideas at the following trainings and conferences:*

Indiana Park and Recreation Association  
IPRA Leadership Conference  
Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy  
Great Lakes Park Training Institute  
DIRT (Dam Information, Resources & Training)  
Indiana Natural Resource Teacher Institute  
HAZWOPER  
American Association for State & Local History  
AASLH: History Leadership Institute  
The Outdoor Economy  
Thought Leadership Conference  
Tillers International: Blacksmith Workshop