

## **Mt. Airy Forest: An Urban Sanctuary for All to Enjoy**

The Cincinnati area is very blessed to have one of the country's most extensive, diverse and beautiful park systems to be found anywhere. By far the largest city park is the 1459 acre woodland paradise Mt. Airy Forest.

The Forest was first started in 1911 when the Cincinnati Park Board acquired land from largely abandoned dairy farms along Colerain Pike. The vision of famed city planner and landscape architect George Kessler was to convert what was largely infertile pasture land into what would become the nation's largest urban reforestation project. The big transformation into a heavily wooded landscape took place during the 1930s. President Franklin Roosevelt's depression era Civilian Conservation Corps was established to put struggling Americans to work with the added benefit of conservation and beautification of our land. A camp that housed hundreds of African American workers was built at the end of Diehl Road. Thousands of trees were planted and numerous stone and timber structures were built that still stand today.

In addition to standard park features like picnic areas and playgrounds, there are many other qualities that make Mt. Airy Forest such a special place. It is largely known as a haven for hikers as there are over 20 miles of trails over varying terrain. A steady flow of volunteers work hard to assist the Cincinnati Park Board to help keep the trails clear and limit the encroachment of invasive plant species. For those who may not want to venture deep into the woods, there are also quiet and scenic roadways for casual strolls, dog walking or bicycling among the trees. Many other activities and attractions are available. The Cincinnati Off Road Alliance (CORA) has established a fantastic mountain biking course that is suitable for riders of all skill levels. CORA is also in the process of creating a bicycle obstacle course in conjunction with Cincinnati Parks. A world-class disc golf course that conducts nationally recognized tournaments is available for all to enjoy. The historic Pine Ridge Lodge, which was originally a farm house, has been neatly converted into a disc golf clubhouse/pro shop known as the Nati. For dog lovers, the Doris Day dog park contains two large fenced

in areas for dogs of all sizes to unleash their boundless energy. Everybody's Treehouse is a unique ADA compliant structure nestled just off the road and is scheduled for a renovation soon. If you haven't seen it yet, it is quite a spectacle to behold. An amazing arboretum with a collection of over 5000 documented plants of over 1600 species covers over 100 acres.

Among the designated areas are collections of viburnums, lilacs and magnolias. Carefully tended gardens, a picturesque lake surrounded by rare conifers and quiet pathways attract horticultural enthusiasts and amateur gardeners alike. With so many outstanding features, Mt. Airy Forest is truly a jewel in the crown of the Queen City.