

Tony Lecorchick – Audubon Wetlands Preserve Manager

Are you familiar with geodes? These are round rocks which contain a hollow cavity completely filled with compact crystal formations. Audubon Wetlands Preserve, located at 1379 Township Road 743, is a hidden gem within the city of Ashland. There are approximately 2 miles of trails in this 215-acre park. While it is mostly swamp forest, this preserve also includes a variety of very high quality wetlands. There is a very old buttonbush swamp, and the burr reed and native cattail marsh is one of the largest in the state. A number of uncommon plants and animals have been seen in this park.

What you see today when you visit this city paradise is not as it was in 2008. At that time it was overgrown with no access to its true hidden treasure of animals, birds, and flowers. That's when park manager, Tony Lecorchick, was introduced to this small piece of earth. Tony was born in Akron, but moved with his family to Ashland at age 12. He holds a full time job and attends church in Ashland. Tony heard about the park district in the fall of 2008 from a friend and offered to help clear trails. From that point on it was truly a labor of love, clearing trails, and in 2010-2011 building bridges and the boardwalk across the marsh area. The park opened in spring of 2009 with Tony becoming the park manager. You will find Tony at the park on his days off and after work keeping the overgrowth in check, otherwise the area would revert to its original state, requiring a machete' to make your way accessible. Along with the physical labor required to mow the grounds and trails, Tony is the overseer of the rookery of the Great Blue Herons. These magnificent birds have several nests high in the trees with their young. These grand birds recently moved and rebuilt their nests in another part of the park, being forced out by the eagles who have made this park their home, as well. Bring your binoculars so you can better view these great assets in their natural habitat.

Experience a peace as you walk along the paths with spring flowers greeting you at every turn. Personally, I love the bluebells but the buttercups come in at a close second. To see these, you will need to visit soon as their flowers will give way to summer. There are some benches along the path, but you may want to bring a collapsible stool if you want to take in the view anywhere along the path, near the rookery, or along the edge of the Black Fork. Look closely at the water's banks and you will see where deer go down for a drink or to cross. If you are a photographer or painter, there are many areas waiting for your talents to capture their beauty.

Short term, Tony's goal is simply to get rid of the overgrowth and invasive weeds in the picnic area to give a clear view of the marshland. This is no small undertaking and any volunteer is welcome to help. Tony looks at what needs to be accomplished and picks one project each year to tackle. His long term goal is merely to keep the park accessible to the public and improve it each year. To maintain the park grounds, he uses a donated garden lawn tractor and chain saw and some shared equipment from other park managers.

Tony states, "I enjoy working and getting out in the park. It's a lot of work and can be tiring after working (my regular job) all day, but it's worth it!"

As you can see, volunteers are essential to the daily operations of the park district. The Ashland County Park District is funded solely through donations, grants, and fundraisers. If you want to

know more about becoming a volunteer at any of our 16 parks, visit our website at www.ashlandcountyparks.com. There you will find information about each park, upcoming events, and information about how you can volunteer. You can visit one of our park meetings held the first Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church.

Get out your hiking shoes. Our parks are waiting for you.



Written by Karen Leonetti for the Farm Column in the Ashland Times Gazette