

Park District expanding

By Gary Budzak - December 7, 2024



60 acres at Campus Lazarus acquired

SUNBURY — Preservation Parks announced Wednesday it has finalized the purchase of 60 acres of Camp Lazarus in Delaware, securing the newest addition to Delaware County's protected natural areas.

The newly acquired acreage, located at the intersection of Winter Road and U.S. Route 23, is adjacent to the main Camp Lazarus property and Seymour Woods State Nature Preserve. This land will support watershed protection and offer expanded outdoor exploration and trail opportunities along the Olentangy River corridor.

"This is an incredible milestone in our mission to protect and conserve the natural and historic features of our county and to inspire outdoor exploration and learning," said Mary Van Haaften, executive director of Preservation Parks. "We can now look forward to creating new trails and unique experiences that will connect our visitors to nature."

Simon Kenton Council, Scouting America will retain ownership of the remaining 170 acres of Camp Lazarus. "This partnership allows us to create even more opportunities for Scouts throughout Central Ohio to engage with nature while fostering community connections," said Travis Gulling, CEO of Scouting America. "We're excited about the expanded programming and the ability to share this beautiful area with our broader community."

The purchase comes amid rapid development in the county, especially along the Route 23 corridor. This future park will offer a place for Scouts and residents to discover nature close to home. It will provide opportunities to connect multiple protected properties, enabling access to nearly seven continuous miles of hiking trails.

Additional benefits include joint programming, such as expanded geocaching, letterboxing, hiking, and nature exploration. The Scouts will benefit from enhanced safety and security through the park district's police presence.

The forested land is rich with pine groves, maple, oak, sycamore, and hickory trees, with an understory of spicebush and several small wetlands. This area serves as a critical buffer for Seymour Woods State Nature Preserve, safeguarding the unique geology, flora, fauna, and streams within the broader Camp Lazarus property.

"Preservation Parks' acquisition of these 60 acres at Camp Lazarus is an incredible asset for our community," said Ted Miller, director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Delaware. "This addition preserves valuable natural space in Delaware and enhances opportunities that make our city a wonderful place to live and explore. We are grateful to Preservation Parks for protecting this unique landscape for future generations."

A small parking lot will be developed in an existing clearing, with plans to add scenic hiking trails, a picnic area, and restrooms. A park opening date has not yet been determined.

Funding for the \$6.2 million purchase was provided through a \$1.3 million grant from the Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Program, and park funds from the 2021 voter-supported land acquisition and park improvement levy.

"We are grateful for the support of Delaware County voters and to the Simon Kenton Council who recognized the importance of conserving this land," added Van Haaften. "Together, we're ensuring this important habitat remains a natural sanctuary for future generations to enjoy." See a video preview of the future park land at <https://youtu.be/0ObBuT6JhWo>.