

PARK NEWS



TULIPS BLOOM IN FRONT OF DWIGHT DAVIS TENNIS CENTER

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Director's Corner

*Reflecting
back, moving
forward*

Dear Members and Friends,

In recent months, I've thought a lot about the visionary St. Louisans who designed, created, championed and reinvigorated Forest Park over the past 150 years. I'm especially grateful to the intrepid and scrappy group who rolled up their sleeves and formed Forest Park Forever 40 years ago.

That handful of friends deserves our praise and gratitude. They started small, knocking on doors and building awareness of the Park's decline. Even as they notched their first successes, like adding benches and repairing lighting, few would have imagined the Park-transforming organization we'd become. The Forest Park we know and appreciate today exists thanks to their determination.

When I joined Forest Park Forever over 15 years ago, we were updating our mission and responsibilities from restoring to actively maintaining and improving. Our partnership with the City of St. Louis, now a national model for sustaining urban parks, has grown stronger each year.

Today's visitor experience in Forest Park, with its beautiful, inviting amenities and natural areas, reflects decades of focus on continual improvement, cultivating relationships and listening to partners throughout our community. This approach is designed to *sustain* the Park, too: We would not have been able to respond to the May 2025 tornado without the relationships and practices we've established over the years.

Now, we're entering a new era with the creation of the Glade (pp. 6–7). The work completed and lessons learned over 40 years have led to this pivotal moment not just for our organization but also for Forest Park and the entire St. Louis community. We can't wait to celebrate—and skate—with you later this year.

Until then, we look forward to commemorating Forest Park's 150th anniversary, Forest Park Forever's 40th and many other milestones and events throughout 2026 (p. 3). Please read on and then make plans to join us in the Park soon!

With gratitude,

Lesley S. Hoffarth, P.E.
President and Executive Director

Boathouse Update: Beer & Wine Garden, Boat & Bike Rentals

Missing patio time on Post-Dispatch Lake while the Boathouse restaurant is closed for renovation? Good news! A pop-up beer and wine garden opens for waterside fun this month.

Near the temporary dock west of the Boathouse, you can enjoy grab-and-go food and drinks, play free yard games and listen to live music. Food trucks will be on site during select weekends.

Big Muddy Adventures has reopened for the season with boat and bike rentals available throughout spring, summer and fall.



Keep up with construction progress and the latest news about the Boathouse at forestparkforever.org/boathouse.



Celebrating a Milestone Year

It's a banner year for Forest Park and Forest Park Forever! In 2026, we're celebrating major milestones, anniversaries and an eagerly anticipated grand opening. Want to keep up with all the exciting things going on this year? Sign up for our biweekly e-newsletter at forestparkforever.org/enews.

150th Anniversary of Forest Park

At a dedication ceremony on June 24, 1876, Presiding Judge of St. Louis County Chauncy F. Shultz presented Forest Park to the people of St. Louis "for the enjoyment of yourselves, your children and your children's children forever."

For the past century and a half, visitors from St. Louis and beyond have enjoyed every inch of this 1,300-acre refuge's recreational areas, paths and trails, waterways, woodlands, prairies, savannas and world-class cultural institutions.

Look for pop-up events on the Park's 150th birthday on June 24 and ways to mark this anniversary throughout the year. And don't miss the Missouri History Museum's exhibit, "Yours Forever: Forest Park at 150."

40th Anniversary of Forest Park Forever

On November 3, 1986, a group of enterprising, forward-looking leaders signed Forest Park Forever's articles of incorporation, ushering in the restoration and revitalization that continues today. In our nonprofit conservancy's early years, we worked with the City of St. Louis to rebuild crumbling infrastructure, renovate historic structures and design and fund improvements that have made Forest Park one of the best urban parks in the nation.

Our innovative public-private partnership with the City continues 40 years on and is considered a national model for urban parks. We're grateful to be entrusted with this treasure and the generous community support that ensures it remains vibrant, beautiful and welcoming to all forever.

More Milestones to Come in 2026

This year includes several more anniversaries and milestones worth celebrating.

Fifth Anniversary of the Anne O'C. Albrecht Nature Playscape: June 2 marks five years since the Anne O'C. Albrecht Nature Playscape opened, enabling splashing, climbing, hopping, storytelling and learning-by-doing for children of all ages. Tens of thousands of native perennials and hundreds of trees planted in this 17-acre space have flourished over the past five years, helping establish beautiful and biologically diverse ecosystems for visitors of all ages to enjoy.

35th Annual Hat Luncheon: June 4 will be our 35th annual Hat Luncheon! Founded by the Women's Committee to jumpstart fundraising for the Park's restoration back in 1991, this has become our largest single annual fundraiser. See page 8 for details on this year's event.

New Park Entrances and the Glade: This year will see several new developments, including the construction of redesigned entrances on the Park's east (Hospital Drive) and west (Lagoon Drive) sides, as well as the completion of the Glade and reopening of Steinberg Rink. We can't wait to introduce the community to the 22.5-acre Glade toward the end of this year (see pp. 6-7).

Long-Term Tornado Recovery Continues



In late 2025, we began what will be the largest, longest-term and costliest part of Forest Park's recovery from the May 2025 tornado: replanting its namesake trees. In both manicured landscapes and natural areas, the EF3 tornado damaged more than 5,200 trees in the Park, toppling or irreparably harming at least 3,100 of them.

It will take years and significant investment to fully recover from the storm and decades to regrow the tree canopy. Partnering with the City of St. Louis, our goal is to plant at least 6,000 trees over the next five years. It's an ambitious plan, but with the same forward-looking optimism we've had since Forest Park Forever's inception 40 years ago—and generous support from our community—we continue to take steps each day to care for, restore and enhance this community treasure.

More Than 1,100 Trees Planted in Late 2025

Our efforts to restore the tree canopy also include the Park's woods. In Successional Forest and around the Anne O'C. Albrecht Nature Playscape, we planted 883 trees of 41 native species during our 26th annual Forest Restoration Day on November 2. One week later, we planted another 160 trees near Kennedy Forest during a collaborative work day with the City's Forest Park Arboricultural Crew.

While many of these trees are saplings, their potential is vast. They represent our organization's and city's hope for a brighter, greener future in Forest Park. Roman Fox, director of Land Management, conveys Forest Park Forever's future-oriented perspective: "We know that today's effort is actually a commitment to future generations. There are trees here today that we won't see their full maturity. And that's okay. That's the commitment that everyone here makes—we're doing this not just for ourselves but for the future of our community and the generations to come."

In December, our arbor team planted 90 trees along Lindell Boulevard, which suffered a near-total loss of mature trees. This familiar landscape was dramatically altered by the storm but is now being replanted with resilient, diverse species that will thrive well into the future, including disease-resistant Princeton elms (*Ulmus americana*), non-fruiting Osage orange trees (*Maclura pomifera*) and scarlet oaks (*Quercus coccinea*). A total of 160 larger trees along Lindell and Skinker Boulevard will be in place by the end of April.

New Trees and Entryway at Lagoon Drive

Another area transformed by the loss of trees is the western edge of the Park, bordered by Skinker Boulevard. Forest Park Forever and the City of St. Louis will soon break ground on a new entryway at Lagoon Drive that improves visibility for pedestrians and drivers, adds seating and plantings and creates an inviting plaza around the Musicians Memorial and Fountain. The design also includes adding 117 new trees in an area nearly stripped of vegetation by the tornado.

Boardwalk and Path Repairs in Kennedy Forest and Savanna

Kennedy Forest and Savanna also suffered significant tornado damage. We're undertaking major maintenance in these areas—grading to improve water distribution, grinding stumps and removing damaged trees. About 17% of the tornado-felled trees will remain in this woodland, intentionally left to provide nutrients to the soil and habitat for resident wildlife.

Five boardwalk bridges in Kennedy Forest that were destroyed or severely damaged in the storm have been repaired or rebuilt, restoring access to these beloved yet secluded spots in the Park.



Forest Park Forever's First Endowed Position is Critical to Tornado Recovery



Our nonprofit's first-ever endowed staff position was established at a critical time for Forest Park. When the tornado destroyed thousands of trees in one afternoon, we were positioned to take immediate action and begin to plan long-term recovery. That is thanks to having a new team dedicated to arbor care led by our McDonnell Conservation Arborist.

The endowed position was established as part of a major gift from Elizabeth and James McDonnell during the Forever campaign. "Forest Park is defined by its trees and the shade and beauty they provide for visitors," said James S. McDonnell III. "Endowing this position ensures that the tree canopy, which is so fundamental to this community asset, will receive the expert care needed to sustain it."

Prior to establishing this team, planting and caring for trees fell within the duties of Forest Park Forever's horticulture team, which designs, plants and maintains hundreds of thousands of square feet of landscapes throughout Forest Park. Now, however,

care for Forest Park's signature asset is the primary focus of an eight-member arbor team built by our first McDonnell Conservation Arborist, Kendall Wachter.

To get a head start on replacing the decades-old trees that were lost, members of this team visited nurseries over the summer to identify larger trees—some three- to six-inch caliper—to purchase and plant in Forest Park. Planting got underway in the fall and winter, with plans to plant 6,000 trees over the next five years. And while Wachter recently relocated out of state this spring to be closer to family, the impact of her leadership continues.

"In a typical year, we might plant 300 to 500 trees in the 'mowed and manicured' areas of the Park—the recreational areas excluding Kennedy and Successional Forests," said Roman Fox, director of Land Management. "But having our arbor team in place before the tornado was critical to jumpstarting recovery; it allows us to plant many more trees knowing they will get the ongoing support they need to thrive."

That support includes regular watering, mulching, monitoring, pruning and shaping in the first few years after planting, which are necessary for optimal health and survival.

"Working with our City partners to ensure the long-term health and succession of Forest Park's tree canopy is one of the important roles we've assumed as our nonprofit reaches its 40th anniversary," said Lesley Hoffarth, Forest Park Forever's president and executive director. "It's difficult to imagine where we'd be in tornado recovery if this natural disaster had happened 10, even five years ago, before this position and our arbor team were established."

2025 by the numbers

TORNADO RECOVERY

1.8 million

Pounds of tornado debris removed from the Nature Reserve

16,000+

Trees assessed after the tornado

5,200

Hours of tornado cleanup

PARK-WIDE CARE

1,500+

Trees planted

150,000+

Bulbs planted

26,890

Perennials and shrubs planted

9,300

Annuals planted

2,000+

Volunteers

13,900

Hours of volunteer service

17.3

Acres treated with prescribed burns



Imagine the Glade, Forest Park's Next Great Destination

The need to restore a 70-year-old ice skating rink sparked a vision for an everyday-use community space that's open, welcoming and built for daily life. Design of the Glade took four years and incorporated feedback from more than 6,000 members of our community. Together, we've envisioned a place where everyone can see themselves in Forest Park.

With 22.5 acres of built amenities and natural features, the Glade is transforming a remote section of Forest Park and limited-use rink into an easily accessible, integrated, multipurpose destination for year-round activity. In addition to ice skating in winter and roller skating in warmer months, visitors will gather around fire pits, splash in fountains and cascades, relax on an expansive lawn, attend festivals and markets and enjoy a bar and dining options never before available in this part of the Park.

The founding gift that established Steinberg Rink in 1957 was inspired by a desire to bring our community together. And we have built upon that inspiration to reimagine eastern Forest Park. The Glade is designed to foster connections while immersing visitors in nature, right in the heart of the City.



Vertical columns with cantilevered beams will form the shade structure west of the rink.



Ceiling of the first floor nearing completion.



Construction Progress

After breaking ground in early 2025, we're on track to welcome visitors to the Glade by the end of 2026, starting with the return of ice skating to Steinberg Rink this winter.

Last year, we focused on foundational work, removing the original limestone veneer for refurbishment, excavating the hillside, installing a state-of-the-art ice system, drilling wells for the award-winning geothermal system, pouring the foundation of the water feature and more.

In early 2026, crews placed the final steel beams forming the ceiling of the first story and erected the all-new second story, which will house the rooftop terrace, dining area and community living room. We also raised vertical columns for rink-side shade structures and installed the girders for the new pedestrian bridge over the Taylor Kindle River.

Keep up with our construction progress at forestparkforever.org/glade-construction.

Imagine the Glade Campaign

The Forest Park we enjoy today is the result of countless supporters' determination and hard work. For the past 40 years, Forest Park Forever has partnered with the City of St. Louis to restore, maintain and continually improve our favorite urban park.

Thank you to everyone who is helping us write this latest chapter in Forest Park's comeback story! There are still so many exciting opportunities to help shape the Glade. Visit forestparkforever.org/imagine or contact Director of Development & Campaigns Megan Crain at mcrain@forestparkforever.org for more information.



The all-new second story takes shape.



Girders for the new pedestrian bridge over the Taylor Kindle River west of the Glade site.

Ways to Engage with Us and Support Forest Park

Corporate & Community Leaders Breakfast



Our public-private partnership with the City of St. Louis uniquely positions us to connect cross-sector leaders who have a shared interest in moving our community forward. On January 21, nearly 70 of those leaders gathered to share challenges, opportunities and successes in elevating St. Louis.

Panelists included President and CEO of the Regional Business Council Karen Branding, City of St. Louis Alderlady Shameem Clark Hubbard, President and CEO of Explore St. Louis Brad Dean and City of St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer.

Forest Parks and Recreation Trivia Night



On February 7, we raised more than \$21,000 at our annual Trivia Night to restore and sustain Forest Park! The event was presented by Dowd Bennett LLP and The Staenberg Group and hosted by the Young Friends of Forest Park Forever.

Congrats to our winners!

- Trivia winners: The Li'l Sebastians
- Best team name: Ghost of DJ Roomba
- Best table decoration: The Low-Cal Calzone Zone
- Best team costume: Fun at Forest Park

Save the date for next year's Trivia Night on Saturday, February 6, 2027.

Women's Committee Kick-Off



On March 5, the Women's Committee of Forest Park Forever kicked off a milestone year. In addition to celebrating Forest Park Forever's 40th anniversary and Forest Park's 150th, this year will feature the 35th annual Hat Luncheon, which was first organized by members of the Women's Committee in 1991.

The festive occasion is co-chaired by two dedicated members of the Women's Committee each year. At the kickoff, we were excited to announce that our 2026 Hat Luncheon co-chairs are Akberet Boykin Farr and Laura Sawyier!



35th Annual Hat Luncheon

You're invited to don bonnet, beret, bowler or baseball cap on June 4 at the Forest Park Forever Hat Luncheon, our most anticipated event and largest annual fundraiser! In partnership with the Centene Foundation, we'll gather at the World's Fair Pavilion to celebrate this milestone year with hat contests, live entertainment, a silent auction and updates on tornado recovery efforts and Park projects made possible by our supporters.

Sponsorship opportunities are available! Contact our Senior Manager, Sponsorship and Business Development, Sara Curran, at scurran@forestparkforever.org or 314.571.6082.

Visit forestparkforever.org/hatluncheon.



Educational Programs Inspire Learning and Love of Forest Park

Our education team collaborates with organizations and educators to create experiences that deepen visitors' relationships with nature through exploration, play and learning. These encounters may inspire the next generation—those who hold the future of our community and Forest Park in their hands—to become lifelong learners and Park enthusiasts.

Spring Storytime

In collaboration with St. Louis Public Library, we host Storytime in Forest Park in spring, summer and fall. Spring Storytime will be held in the Meadow area of the Anne O'C. Albrecht Nature Playscape on Mondays between March 16 and May 18. You bring your imagination, and we'll bring snacks, water and picnic blankets! This event is free and open to children of all ages and their caregivers.

Spring Field Trips

Each school year we host or facilitate field trips for hundreds of children from throughout the St. Louis region who enjoy a day of experiential learning outdoors, a new experience for many of them. If you are an educator interested in a 2026–27 school year field trip in Forest Park, contact us at learn@forestparkforever.org.



STL Summer Adventure

Each year, a few of Forest Park's many opportunities for play and learning are featured in the STL Summer Adventure, a community reading, exploration and learning program by St. Louis County Library and St. Louis Public Library. This year, four Forest Park learning pathways and activities are included, encouraging children to: visit a Storybook Walk, dig in and get dirty in Nature Playscape, play "Around the World" at the Nicholas J. Booker Basketball Courts and see stars perform under the night sky from the free seats at The Muny. Learn more at stlsummeradventure.org.

Play Day in the Park

Play Day in the Park, presented by Forest Park Forever, St. Louis County Library, St. Louis Public Library, the Saint Louis Science Center and The Magic House, is designed to highlight how play and reading shape children's growth. At the fourth annual event, families can explore bubble play, outdoor art, parachute games, sports activities, STEM lab explorations and more. Join us Saturday, May 30!

2025 Education Programs in Review

48

School field trips facilitated by our team

100%

Teachers who'd recommend our field trips

73

Free programs offered

5,151

Program participants

21

ZIP codes represented

Recent Park Maintenance & Improvements



GREEN CARE

Tree Planting

Tree planting has focused largely on areas damaged in the tornado. More than 1,100 were planted along Lindell Boulevard, in the Anne O’C. Albrecht Nature Playscape, along Wells Drive and in Successional Forest.

Seasonal Planters

Festive winter greenery was replaced with spring annuals in highly visible planters at Jefferson Lake and Emerson Grand Basin.

Spring Bulbs

More than 150,000 bulbs planted last fall bloomed this spring to bring vibrant color throughout the Park. Many tasty tulip bulbs avoided becoming deer snacks thanks to our team strategically planting them alongside bitter, toxic daffodil bulbs.



Kennedy Forest and Savanna

After suffering significant tornado damage, these areas are undergoing major maintenance, including grading to improve water distribution, grinding stumps and removing damaged trees.

Prescribed Burns

Prescribed burns were completed this season on 12.6 acres near Langenberg Field, on Wildlife Island, in Deer Lake Savanna and in Successional Forest. Learn about the benefits of burns at forestparkforever.org/conservation.



Nature Playscape Nests

New hand-woven, 10-foot wide “nests” made from harvested vines have been installed in the Nature Playscape. The Playscape’s design invites children to explore amid natural materials.



MAINTENANCE

Kennedy Forest Boardwalks

Five boardwalk bridges in Kennedy Forest have been repaired or rebuilt after damage from tornado-felled trees, restoring access to this favorite secluded spot in the Park.

The Cascades

Recent maintenance included replacing a pump and motor that are essential to keeping these dramatic waterfalls functioning properly.

Murphy Lake and Fish Hatchery

Sewer lines that contributed to flooding in these areas have been repaired, and the nearby paved recreational trails were improved to reduce water pooling.

Nathan Frank Bandstand

The basement—yes, this historic bandstand has a basement!—was damaged by flooding, and our team made necessary structural repairs. Restoration work on the rest of this historic structure, which dates back to 1925, continues.

Drinking Fountains

Fountains at the Dennis & Judith Jones Visitor and Education Center, World’s Fair Pavilion, and Emerson Central Fields have been upgraded to better withstand heavy year-round use.

Nature Playscape Pathways

After the wood toe rails on the boardwalks kept getting damaged, our team upgraded them to aluminum, continuing to ensure ADA compliance while increasing longevity and safety. Sinking, cracking asphalt was also replaced.



Spring Events in Forest Park



Animals Aglow at the Zoo

March 13–May 17

Animals Aglow illuminates the Saint Louis Zoo this spring with towering lanterns and light displays that celebrate the culture, art and beauty of traditional Chinese lantern festivals. Nightly entertainment includes juggling and dancing acts. Specialty food, beverages and handicrafts are available for purchase.

Learn more: stlzoo.org/animalsaglow



Shakespeare in the Park

May 27–June 21

A favorite St. Louis summer tradition returns to Shakespeare Glen in Forest Park with free performances of *The Tempest*. After a violent storm, travelers wash ashore on a mysterious island where nothing is quite as it seems.

Learn more: stlshakes.org



Star Parties & Solar Sundays

First Friday and third Sunday of each month

We're still looking up to the sky as the McDonnell Planetarium at the Saint Louis Science Center undergoes a major upgrade. Evening Star Parties are held on the first Friday of each month. Daytime Solar Sundays occur on the third Sunday of each month, and weekly between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Learn more: slsc.org/mcdonnell-planetarium



Twilight Thursdays

May 7, 14, 21, 28

The perennially popular, free outdoor concert series returns to the Missouri History Museum. The spring lineup includes JAM: Michael Jackson and Bruno Mars Tribute, the Soundtrack of Sade, the Music of Sly and the Family Stone and a Diana Ross Tribute.

Learn more: mohistory.org/events



Roman Art at SLAM

Exhibited through August 16

Majestic marble sculptures and vivid frescoes, along with mosaics, glass vessels and bronze artifacts, vividly chronicle life at the height of Rome's empire in *Ancient Splendor: Roman Art in the Time of Trajan*. The exhibition speaks to the enduring power of art as a political and social tool.

Learn more at: slam.org



2026 Season at The Muny

June 15–August 23

The oldest, largest outdoor musical theater in the country kicks off its 108th season on June 15 with *Hairspray*. The 2026 lineup also includes *Shrek the Musical*, *South Pacific*, *Disney's Newsies*, *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations*, *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Something Rotten!*

Learn more: muny.org

LEFFINGWELL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT



“We live in Illinois, but we’ve been going to Forest Park since we were kids. Too many folks think the Mississippi River is an ocean, but we can be in Forest Park in 25 minutes. It’s such a hidden gem, especially for people who aren’t from this area. We like introducing new people so they then go and enjoy all the activities and amenities.

We started giving when Forest Park wasn’t in its heyday because we didn’t want to see it keep deteriorating. There’s just so much history there. We continue to give to ensure others get to experience the same things we have. It’s about tradition and thinking about the future. We take our grandkids to the Park, and we hope that 50 years from now, they’re taking their grandkids there.”

—Ken & Angie Nettleton

To join the Leffingwell Society, our leadership donor group, contact us at membership@forestparkforever.org or 314.367.7275. You can also learn more and join online at forestparkforever.org/leffingwell.

“I planned a celebration of my parents at their tribute maple tree on May 17, 2025. The tornado struck the day before. My granddaughter was in the Art Museum when the storm hit, and it took her hours to get out of the Park afterward.

I drove over to see if the roads were passable, and the main route to the museum had been completely cleared by 8 p.m. It was unbelievable. I am in awe of what the City and Forest Park Forever did in such a short amount of time, and I am very grateful.

Many of my friends who attended the celebration now come more often to the Park and have made donations to plant trees.”

—Maggy Malcolm

To become a member or renew your membership, contact us at membership@forestparkforever.org or 314.367.7275. You can also learn more at forestparkforever.org/join. If you are interested in giving a tribute tree, bench, brick or flowers, visit forestparkforever.org/tributes!

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Sustain Forest Park with Monthly Support

Become a monthly giving member! It's easy to sign up, and it's a convenient way to give because it's automatic—a win-win for you and for Forest Park Forever.

For you:

- Offers budget-friendly options
- Decreases the amount of mail you receive
- Increases the impact of your gift

For Forest Park Forever:

- Makes it easier to budget and plan how to care for the Park
- Saves on administrative costs
- Sustains the Park monthly!

\$1,000 Leffingwell Society: \$84/month

\$500 Park Guardian: \$42/month

\$300 Park Trustee: \$25/month

\$180 Park Naturalist: \$15/month

\$100 Keeper of the Park: \$9/month

\$60 Park Friend: \$5/month

How it works:

Sign up quickly and securely with a credit/debit card or bank account.

Your monthly gift will be processed on or near the 15th of every month, and you may increase, decrease or cancel your monthly gift at any time.

Your membership will automatically renew every year, and your member benefits will be mailed to you at that time.

Your monthly gifts are tax-deductible, and you'll receive a summary of your gifts each January for the previous calendar year.

To sign up, visit forestparkforever.org/monthly-giving.

For questions, email membership@forestparkforever.org or call 314.571.6074.

Thank You to Our Tribute Donors

Tribute gifts are a unique and thoughtful way to celebrate a special occasion or pay homage to a loved one while supporting Forest Park. To learn more about tribute gifts in Forest Park or make a gift, email tributes@forestparkforever.org, call 314.367.7275 or visit forestparkforever.org/tributes.

Thank you to our tribute donors who made a gift between November 2025 and February 2026.

IN HONOR OF

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PARK NEWS

