

CONSERVANCY

SPRING / SUMMER 2021, VOLUME 6: ISSUE 2

the
**HEALTH
& WELLNESS**
issue

Cultivating a Green Community

READ ABOUT THE GREEN GIRL GANG ON PAGE 22





HOW CAN YOU BRING
NATURE INTO YOUR
OWN HOME?

READ ABOUT IT ON PAGE 16!



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COVER PHOTO
& PHOTO LEFT CREDIT:
ZAINA SALEM

OUR MISSION

The Conservancy enriches people’s lives and enhances our region by inspiring use, preservation and support of Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

CONSERVANCY MAGAZINE
Spring/Summer 2021,
Volume 6: Issue 2

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A LETTER FROM THE
CONSERVANCY CEO

For most of us, living through a pandemic provided challenges that we never imagined we would ever face. For some of us, there were added complications, from dealing with the death or illness of loved ones, to stress over events that threatened our well-being.

What we experienced in Cuyahoga Valley National Park is that record numbers of people turned to our park and to nearby parks to connect with nature and with friends and family. We heard many times that the park provided a place for physical activity, inspiration, and solace. Many experienced for the first time what long-time park visitors know: being in nature is physically and mentally healthy. What good news this is that more people locally and around the country appreciate our parks and better understand why we need to preserve and protect nature.

In this issue, you will read a variety of ways that healthcare professionals and area residents value the park. As we move out of the pandemic, one of the changes I hope we make as a culture is to better appreciate how critical nature is, and that we strive to make experiences in green spaces available to all people. This should impact how we design our cities, how we fund natural areas, and how we educate children.

In a challenging time, many of us had our best moments on trails with family and friends. Now we need to invest in those trails and in our park so that future generations benefit from healthy experiences in nature.

Deb Yandala CONSERVANCY CEO

CORRECTION

In the Fall 2020 issue of the Conservancy magazine Ms. Elaine Jones was omitted at the Locktenders’ Circle giving level. We apologize for this error.

THE HISTORY OF HEALTH & GREENSPACE

“The physician treats, but nature heals.”

WRITTEN BY
Haley Bittaker

The quote is not from a 21st century doctor, but rather, the 400 BC “father of medicine.” Though a novel idea at the time, scientists are just now confirming what Hippocrates innately knew: nature is a restorative force.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

The idea of greenspace being good for you is not a new concept—it has been developing for centuries. Take a look at how research and science has evolved over the years.

1800s

In the 1800s, Frederic Law Olmsted, an architect and key designer of Central Park in New York City, was one of the first people to voice the idea that having access to greenspace was an important part of city living.

“The enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.”

– FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

1860

Florence Nightingale—or “The Lady with the Lamp,” as some may know her—is considered one of the founders of scientific nursing, and her notes are still used today in modern nursing practice. One of Nightingale’s ideas was her Environmental Theory, which states that nursing “is an act of utilizing the environment of the patient to assist him in his recovery.” Her theory goes on to mention how external factors associated with the patient’s surroundings affect the quality of care, speed of healing, and overall outcome. She recommends fresh air “to keep the air he breathes as pure as the external air without chilling him,” and sunlight (especially direct sunlight), mentioning, “the usefulness of light in treating disease is very important.”

1880s–1920

When Tuberculosis ravaged the world in the late 1800s, little was known about what it was or how to treat it. Many desperate attempts were made to progress the treatments used to save patients.

In 1901 the Manhattan State Hospital, the largest psychiatric hospital in the world, began receiving patients who had contracted Tuberculosis in addition to their psychological diagnoses. In an attempt to save patients, a little bit of guess work yielded incredible results. The hospital’s superintendent, Alexander Macdonald, had an idea to set up patients in two large canvas tents on the hospital grounds. There was no known treatment for the disease at the time, but many doctors endorsed the idea that cold, clean air could improve the condition. The tents were constantly open on one end allowing clean air to flood the tents at all times.

After one year, 62 of 81 residents of this outdoor ward had survived. The idea of going away to a mountain sanatorium to cure tuberculosis was on the horizon as an effective treatment. What made Macdonald’s tent experiment unique was the improvement of not just the tuberculosis of the patients, but how the outdoor lifestyle helped the mental health of the asylum patients as well, including weight gain, clearer thoughts and improved spirits.

1973

The term *biophilia*, or “the passionate love of life and of all that is alive,” was a term used in the 1973 publication of “The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness” by a psychoanalyst named Erich Fromm. The term was later used by biologist Edward O. Wilson in his publication “Biophilia” in 1984, that proposes the idea that humans have a genetic need to see a connection with nature and other forms of life. Wilson goes on to say nature is a natural part of life due to our naturally evolved genome, and proposed that we have a need for nature due to genetic memory.

1982

Shinrin-yoku is the Japanese phrase for “forest bathing,” the idea to let nature into your body through the five senses. Forest bathing was pioneered in 1982 by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and was a response to the public health crisis of high stress levels at work and a spike in rates of auto-immune disease.

Now popular worldwide, the practice encourages people to simply spend time in nature and connect to it through sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Numerous studies have found that “forest bathing” has positive physiological effects, such as blood pressure reduction, improvement of autonomic and immune functions, as well as psychological effects of alleviating depression and improving mental health.

1992

Theodore Roszak coined the term *Ecopsychology* in his 1992 book called ‘The Voice of the Earth.’ Ecopsychology applies ecological and psychological theories to study the relationship between people and the natural world.

Roszak explains that an individual’s relationship to nature can improve their interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being.

2013

In 2013 a group of park agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizers came together to start the very first Park Prescription Program. This group developed the National ParkRx Initiative with the goal of supporting a new community of Park Prescription practitioners and the emerging trend of prescribing nature to improve mental and physical health.

Since then, the popularity of the movement has spread across the country. The ParkRx program focuses on programs that include a health or social service provider who encourages their patients to spend time in nature with the goal of improving their health and well-being.

Keep an eye on forcvnp.org for health and wellness videos this summer and fall!

The Conservancy recognizes that every treatment is as unique as the patient. We don’t believe that nature is the cure to all mental and physical health conditions and only suggest it as one of many options for treatment. Please consult your doctor for treatment that is best for you.

A Warm Welcome
to our New Conservancy
Staff Members!



Senior Director of Community Partnerships
Donté Gibbs

In this newly established leadership position, Donté will represent the Conservancy in establishing strategic partnerships and collaborating with external organizations and individuals in the Cleveland and Akron areas to advance the mission of the Conservancy. Donté’s work will focus on promoting Cuyahoga Valley National Park, environmental preservation, social justice, health and wellness, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. He has over 12 years of experience in the local community with the ability to identify challenges and initiate solutions that elevate communities, bolster philanthropic support, and define impactful change. Throughout his career, Donté led many community initiatives including #Masks4Community, #CMNHEngaged, local playground builds, and Donté’s Gift Express®. As Senior Director of Community Partnerships, he hopes to strategically champion equitable access to our parks, promote diversity and create dynamic relationships and partnerships that reshape how we all view and enjoy our national park.



Director, James A. Garfield Alliance
Marc Nathanson

Marc’s background and successes have been built in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. His for-profit experience was with the world’s largest manufacturer of women’s costume jewelry, Monet Jewelers, as their VP of Sales and Marketing. He has been leading nonprofit organizations either as Executive Director or as Development lead for the past 20 years. His journey began at New Life Community, then to Old Stone Education Center and West Side Catholic Centers as Executive Director, and for the last ten years as Director of Development at Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

Marc’s goals as the Director of the James A. Garfield Alliance are to preserve the legacy of James A. Garfield, our 20th President, and to support the Garfield Historic Site through philanthropy, hosting area events, and inspiring the community into action.

TWO TRUTHS
& A LIE

Can you guess which statement is a lie?

DONTÉ

I hiked up the still-active Pacaya Volcano in Guatemala in 2012.

I met Beyoncé during the On The Run II Tour in Cleveland in 2018.

I was featured in Who’s Who in America in 2020.

MARC

I have traveled to both El Salvador and Nepal for mission work.

I am a skiing enthusiast.

I have served as a Chaplain at St. Vincent’s Charity Hospital.

SEE IF YOU GUESSED
RIGHT IN THE KEY BELOW!

KEY
MARC’S LIE: Marc has never been on a pair of skis in his life.
DONTÉ’S LIE: Donté unfortunately didn’t get to meet Beyoncé.

WORK THE MOUNTAIN,

WRITTEN BY
Zaina Salem

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY
Luke Bushatz



A US Army veteran finds mental rest in the great outdoors.

For years, Luke Bushatz struggled with the fact that he came home.

As a US Army veteran who was deployed to Afghanistan, Luke couldn't reconcile why he only limped away from military service while others he served with didn't make it out alive.

"There were plenty of bad ways I dealt with the trauma, but using nature as therapeutic recreation was the conduit that allowed me to begin to heal from the unseen wounds of combat," Luke said. "I found in nature a salve for the soul that I couldn't find anywhere else."

Luke grew up in Marion County, Ohio and had a real love for the outdoors all his life—as a kid, he enjoyed the serene landscape of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and in his adulthood, he moved to Alaska with his family to continue to get that nature medicine in spades.

Luke had the opportunity to go back to his roots when he applied for the Warrior Expeditions program, a veteran program that facilitates veterans conducting long thru-hikes on trails all over America, and was selected to hike the Buckeye Trail.

"The Buckeye Trail runs right through Cuyahoga Valley National Park and was one of the most scenic and memorable portions of the trail for me during my thru-hike," Luke said.

In February 2018, Luke went on a trip with Remedy Alpine, an organization that serves our veteran community through guided excursions that facilitate personal growth and healing in outdoor spaces.

"I began volunteering with them at that time and haven't looked back since," Luke said.

REST YOUR MIND

MENTAL

HEALTH & WELLNESS

REMEDY ALPINE 2019
EXPEDITION ON CROW PASS
TRAIL IN THE CHUGACH
MOUNTAINS IN ALASKA.



MENTAL

"When I go out into nature for as little as 20 minutes, I am able to gain perspective and refocus my energy and attention. The more time I spend outdoors the greater the perspective I gain."

— LUKE BUSHATZ

Luke works with two dedicated veterans, David Joslin and Eric Collier, who founded Remedy Alpine in 2017. David and Eric met in 2013 through the Wounded Warrior Project, and shortly after meeting they realized they both shared a passion for taking care of veterans and finding peace and solitude in the backcountry. From this early bond, Remedy Alpine came to life with a shared vision: using the environment of the mountains and backcountry experiences, combined with infusing comradeship and solitude with personal challenge and achievement, and being witness to the healing powers of the outdoors.

By utilizing nature to strip away the routine of everyday life, Remedy Alpine seeks to help veterans reset emotional and mental perspectives, be more creative, and gain insight into themselves. The organization provides military and veteran expeditions in South-central Alaska, and Luke has

done expeditions with the group in the Chugach, Talkeetna, Kenai and Alaska mountain ranges.

"Much of the work that military members do on behalf of our country can be very traumatic," Luke said. "The strain that this trauma can exert on an individual both mentally and physically can be very difficult to deal with at times."

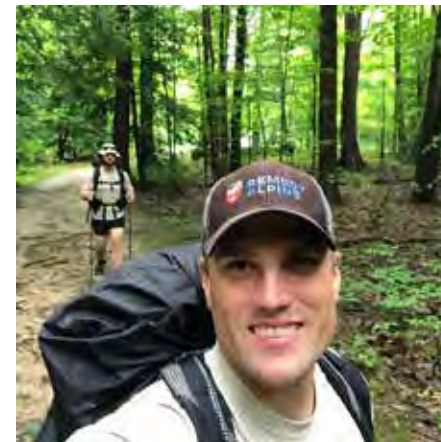
"When I go out into nature for as little as 20 minutes, I am able to gain perspective and refocus my energy and attention. The more time I spend outdoors the greater the perspective I gain," Luke said. "By breaking out of my daily routine and challenging myself physically through hiking, climbing or skiing, I am forced to face the mental and emotional challenges that exist in my life. Through the use of nature, I am better able to reconcile these challenges and be a productive and valued member in my community, country, and world."

Remedy Alpine's past participants have reported less stress, more creative focus, and better ability to cope with daily stressors following their multi-day expeditions. On day trips, participants have reported a positive view of their personal accomplishments and lowered stress.

For people who are looking to improve their mental health, Luke recommends dedicating just 20 consecutive minutes outside each day.

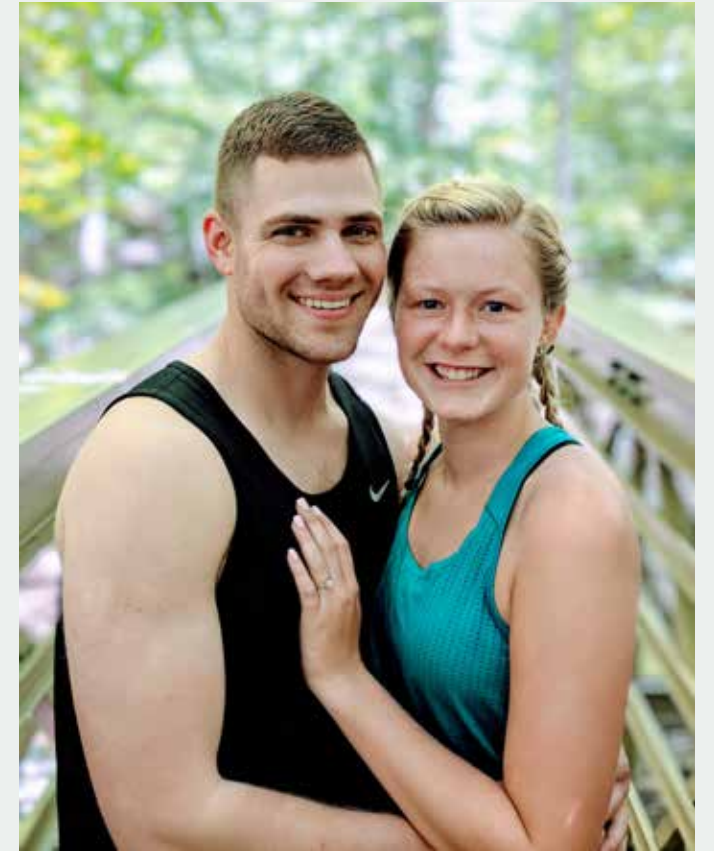
"Positive habits are a big part of building mental resiliency," Luke said. "This little block of time can do amazing things in helping you reset your brain and strengthen almost every aspect of mental well-being."

"The CVNP trail system is a gateway to personal discovery for everyone that has the opportunity to access the hiking, biking and water trails that it has to offer," Luke said. "Next time you're out on a hike, go a little further, breathe a little deeper and see how those intentional steps empower you on a personal level. And as we say at Remedy Alpine, 'Work the mountain, rest your mind.'"



**WHEN AT HOME, LUKE ENJOYS
HIKING IN CUYAHOGA VALLEY
NATIONAL PARK.**

HIKING FOR A CAUSE



HEALTH & WELLNESS

As a veteran who has been positively affected by nature, Dan Pollock wanted to live a more intentional life.

Not only did he want this for himself, but he wanted to inspire other people to do the same—so he and his wife, Liz Pollock, started **"Experience 62."**

"We're just two regular people trying to figure out how to make the world a better place by doing what we love," Dan said.

Dan and Liz founded Experience 62 as a way to share their journey of visiting all the national parks in America. Recently, they used their platform to raise money for Remedy Alpine while also bringing awareness to other organizations that support veteran wellness and eliminate veteran suicide.

To read more about Dan and Liz, visit the Conservancy's blog at forvcnp.org/news.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. LISA RAMIREZ SHAH

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
METROHEALTH SYSTEM'S SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM

We read how greenspace and nature positively affected Luke Bushatz—but what is the science behind why?

Dr. Lisa Ramirez Shah is the Director of Community and Behavioral Health for the MetroHealth System’s School Health Program. She is a Board-Certified Child and Adolescent Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Case Western Reserve School of Medicine. She is a regional expert in childhood adversity and toxic stress, and is interested in the overlap and integration of systems (e.g., medical, educational, justice) in meeting the needs of Northeast Ohio’s youth. Her background includes hospital- and community-based mental health consultation and service delivery to diverse, urban populations. Dr. Ramirez Shah is a proud Conservancy Board Member.

Dr. Ramirez Shah gives us insight into the effects that trauma has on mental health, why your mental health is important for overall health, and how you can use greenspace as a tool to improve your overall well-being.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH?

DR. RAMIREZ SHAH: Going into the pandemic in early 2020, many of us were able to pull from the emotional reserves that healthy coping had provided us (e.g., strong social networks, movement and exercise, etc.). As the pandemic stretched into months and the risk of infection required social isolation and a significant shift to working from home, many of the healthy coping strategies that had served us well were no longer compatible with what we were being asked to do. On top of losing social connection, we added layers of the grief and loss process (more obviously loss of health and perhaps loved ones, but less obviously were the loss of relationships and routines and milestones), anxiety, prolonged stress and fight or flight/survival mode.

On a positive note, we are seeing increased openness and willingness to acknowledge mental health needs, and it’s important that we are offering realistic and effective strategies and services for those reaching out for support.

HOW DOES MENTAL HEALTH TIE INTO OVERALL HEALTH?

DR. RAMIREZ SHAH: The mind and body contribute to the same system and are intimately connected. Our minds are sensitive to the body’s cues and will respond in the same way that our bodies will react to signals sent out by the mind. Consider the effect of stress: our brain releases cortisol and norepinephrine into our bodies when

it is triggered into a stress response. In the short term—a few minutes or even days—these hormones will absorb back into our bodies with no significant effects. However, when these stress responses become prolonged, the hormones begin to impact many different systems within our body and we can see health effects as a result (e.g., gastrointestinal issues, endocrine disruption, rashes, lowered immunity and many more).

Depression, on the other hand, can decrease our motivation and ability to get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and activity, which can often worsen the feelings of depression. Also, when we are struggling mentally, we often make poorer choices in what we are putting in our bodies and how we are coping, which absolutely effects overall health.

In this way, knowing that our mental and overall health are so closely connected provides hope that addressing one can lead to improvements in the other. Investments in mental health and wellness not only potentially contribute to things like improved mood, functioning and relationships, but these investments can also have long-term effects on our health outcomes.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR MENTAL HEALTH?

DR. RAMIREZ SHAH: We’ve talked about how stress can impact health, and trauma is no exception. There are many types of trauma, including acute, chronic and complex, and they can all have long-lasting and

widespread effects on a person. We now know that trauma in childhood puts individuals at risk for negative health outcomes and risky behaviors in adulthood.

Trauma is also very effective at masking as other disorders, and can often be misunderstood and mislabeled as attention problems and significant mood disorders. In this way, trauma is important to acknowledge, understand, and treat so that it does not continue to wreak havoc even when the trauma itself has disappeared. Fortunately, we have many effective strategies to address trauma, and investing in mental health for those who have experienced trauma will help in the healing process.

WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE TO BETTER IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

DR. RAMIREZ SHAH: Get outside! One of the most powerful ways to protect yourself from the long-term/toxic effects of stress is to get plenty of physical movement and exercise, which inherently happens when we are walking around parks and greenspace.

Another important and effective coping strategy to protect ourselves from toxic stress is "mindfulness," or the act of grounding ourselves and feeling present; when an individual receives important sensory input of vibrant colors, unpredictable sounds and smells, among others, we are often reminded to pause the tendency to dwell on the past or worry about the future, and instead are focused on these sensory experiences around us, not to mention the breaks from

“Investments in mental health and wellness not only potentially contribute to things like improved mood, functioning and relationships, but these investments can also have long-term effects on our health outcomes.”

— DR. RAMIREZ SHAH

virtual meetings, artificial lighting, and sitting for hours on end.

There is also evidence that being in nature can even improve your sleep, which contributes so much to mood, memory, mental health and overall well-being.

Finally, try setting small goals in the park, like completing certain trails or walking/biking/hiking a certain number of miles, etc. You’ll feel a sense of accomplishment on top of all the benefits of being outdoors, which is itself a mental health boost!

Bring Nature Into Your Home

PHOTO BY Zaina Salem

Design Your Own Ecoscape at Home!

We connect with nature using all five of our senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. When we spend time away from nature, it leads to anxiety and stress in the short-term, and can lead to illness in the long-term.

When we are unable to visit our favorite natural areas—whether that be from lack of access to parks and greenspace, or for other reasons—bringing pieces of nature home can give us consistent access to its benefits.

Here is how you can create your own ecoscape at home, so you can get your daily dose of nature!

SIGHT: The repetitive patterns found in nature, called fractal patterns, deeply affect us and present health benefits. Scientists have been studying what happens to the brain when a person looks at a fractal using fMRI, eye-tracking equipment, and other brain tracking technology. The results show the brain having a reaction to these fractals, especially while looking at fractals found in nature, which have shown a reduction in stress by up to 60%. These natural fractals resonate with the human brain, stimulating relaxation.

SOUND: Listen to the calming sounds of nature such as rainfall or singing birds.

TOUCH: Touching the textures, shapes, and patterns of nature can remind us of greenspace and stimulate our brains.

TASTE: Natural teas are reminiscent of nature and can be soothing to the body.

SMELL: The scents of plants and essential oil diffusers can lift our mood, relax us, and make us feel grounded.

Look for small pieces of nature in your own backyard or community. Please remember to follow “Leave No Trace” principles while in CVNP and leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them.

A RIVER OF

SECOND CHANCES

ENVIRONMENTAL

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Meet the Cuyahoga River—a 100-mile, U-shaped river whose headwaters are in Burton, Ohio. From Burton it flows south to Akron, turning to flow north through Cuyahoga Valley National Park before eventually spilling into Lake Erie.

WRITTEN BY
Sam Harsh

PHOTOS BY
Zaina Salem

This river has met generations of people living in Northeast Ohio and has historically been an important trade route connecting the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. Native Americans canoed it for centuries, and in the 1800s settlers used its water to feed the northern sections of the Ohio & Erie Canal. The canal grew the economy exponentially, transforming Akron and Cleveland from sleepy villages into booming industrial centers, gradually becoming the communities we inhabit today.

With this success, however, came a price. The increase of factories and industrial activity along the river led to extreme pollution. We know the stories—“the river that oozes,” the oily contaminants floating beneath its surface setting the water aflame at least 13 times. The environmental degradation of the Cuyahoga River caught the nation’s attention when Time Magazine published a story about it in 1969.

It’s safe to say the Cuyahoga has been through a lot. Thankfully, it’s been fifty years since the Cuyahoga River caught on fire for the last time. Today, the river proudly boasts several special classifications: it is a prominent feature of the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, an American Heritage River, an Ohio Water Trail, and a portion of it is an Ohio Scenic River. A river once known for its toxic sludge is now known as a river of environmental renewal—a river of second chances.

So, how did we get here?

IT BEGAN WITH COMMUNITY

grassroots efforts in the 1960s and 70s (and even before that), with people clamoring for change and increased protections for the Cuyahoga River and the land surrounding it. The creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 and the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972 led to practices and policies that significantly decreased pollution. Next came the establishment of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area in 1974, eventually becoming Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) in 2000.

“This meant federal protection from land development around scenic and historically significant sections of the river,” says Ryan Ainger, CVNP Park Ranger and River Program Manager. “The National Park Service was now a stakeholder in the future of the Cuyahoga and its watershed, which we see the benefits of today.”

The designation of Cuyahoga Valley as a National Park wasn’t all that it took to help the river, though. CVNP still works alongside community organizations and local park systems to maintain the ecological health of the Cuyahoga. Certain factors such as loss of fish habitat, closures to recreation and degradation of scenic quality continue to be evaluated by park scientists. Keystone species such as the bald eagle, northern hogsucker, beaver and river otter, wildlife that are particularly sensitive to water pollution, are monitored regularly. You can see all of these species thriving in CVNP today.

The 2019 designation of the Cuyahoga as an Ohio Water Trail was also a groundbreaking step forward for the river. The Cuyahoga River Water Trail (CRWT) is the unification of ten land management partners and 15 community group stakeholders,

including CVNP, the Conservancy, Cleveland Metroparks and Summit Metro Parks, the EPA, West Creek Conservancy, and others.

“If just CVNP were to focus its efforts towards the river, that’s less than a quarter of the river getting the attention it deserves,” explains Ainger. “The CRWT and its partners can now ensure that the entire length of the Cuyahoga River is as accessible for recreation as possible. The benefit to our neighbors across northeast Ohio and to our visitors from afar is consistent information and opportunities no matter where you plan to start or end your river trip.”

People can enjoy the Cuyahoga River in a myriad of ways. You can enjoy views of the river without leaving Cleveland or Akron city limits. With a short drive or bus ride, you can access the Cuyahoga via several different park systems. Whether you like hiking, photography, fishing, or water recreation such as canoing or kayaking, there is something for everyone.

Ensuring the Cuyahoga remains a fun and safe place for people to recreate takes a lot of hard work, though. This spring, Ainger stepped into the role of River Program Manager for Cuyahoga Valley National Park, a new position to CVNP this year. Being a “river ranger” requires a multitude of skills and experience—Ainger has been with the

park for 7 years, and has certifications as a River Kayak Instructor, Emergency Medical Responder and Wilderness First Aid/CPR.

“I serve a lot of different functions while on the water,” says Ainger. “The biggest role is being accessible for visitors who might have questions or, in rare cases, need emergency assistance. I help visitors determine what conditions are safe based on their ability level, help plan river trips, and warn visitors of any known issues like downed trees... I act as a ‘safety boater,’ an additional paddler for NPS staff that can assist in rescues and navigating down the river through hazards. I paddle with our law enforcement rangers as they do patrols on water, our maintenance division when downed trees need to be removed from the river, and our resource management scientists when they have river-based research projects.”

Joining Ainger as a full-time employee this year is Giovanni Tabacchi, returning to CVNP after a summer season here in 2020. Tabacchi brings with him over 15 years of experience as a river ranger at Grand Teton National Park on the Snake River, working on the river with a Visitor & Resource Protection focus. Raft patrols, assisting with rescues, writing grants and overseeing other river projects are just a few of the responsibilities he had at Tetons.

At CVNP, Tabacchi took Visitor & Resource Protection rangers out on river patrols and conducted a survey of a hazardous area of the river near Rockside access point that the park has identified as needing remediation. He also brought a 12-foot whitewater raft with him, which was crucial in the removal of downed trees and 250 pounds of trash from the Cuyahoga.

The Cuyahoga River has come a long way, but there’s still work to be done. Combined sewer overflow, flooding from urban runoff and erosion are just some of the challenges the river continues to face today. Being mindful of littering and picking up trash when you’re able are great ways to help the Cuyahoga and other local waterways. Supporting partnerships like the CRWT and organizations like the Conservancy helps us maintain the river and keep it a safe place for both people and wildlife to enjoy.

Summer 2021 is bound to be another busy season for CVNP. While we play an important role in maintaining the health of the Cuyahoga River, it can also play a role in maintaining our own health—whether it’s through hiking, kayaking or taking in a nice river view after a long day.

Ainger emphasizes that it doesn’t have to come down to taking big river trips to get a little renewal out of the Cuyahoga River.

“My favorite way to protect and promote our river is simply by enjoying it as much as I can,” Ryan says. “No matter your interest, there is something calming about being near running water that everyone will find good for their wellbeing.”

CUYAHOGA RIVER
WATER TRAIL
MANAGING PARTNERS:

- City of Akron
- City of Cuyahoga Falls
- City of Kent
- Cleveland Metroparks
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park
- Geauga Park District
- Mantua Village
- Portage Park District
- Summit Metro Parks
- Village of Silver Lake

To view other partners of the CRWT, please visit their website at: cuyahogariverwatertrail.org/history.

“The CRWT and its partners can now ensure that the entire length of the Cuyahoga River is as accessible for recreation as possible. The benefit to our neighbors across northeast Ohio and to our visitors from afar is consistent information and opportunities no matter where you plan to start or end your river trip.”

– RYAN AINGER

Cultivating a Green Community

WRITTEN BY
Jennifer Daring

PHOTOS BY
Zaina Salem

SOCIAL

HEALTH & WELLNESS

IT WAS A SUNDAY IN 2018, AND I WAS TERRIFIED. I was teetering on the notion of going to Wellness Fest, a festival hosted and centralized around women. **Here's the thing:** I was used to doing outdoorsy and adventurous things with my guy friends—being engulfed in a festival that focused on all women was not my cup of tea. Women were catty and superficial in my mind. I lacked female friends due to the absence of common interests. I was worried I was going to hate it. But, I was lacking a connection that I was not aware I was missing.

This day was such a pivotal point in my life. I connected and bonded with so many like-minded women. I heard stories, participated in crafts, hiked, slack lined, got reiki, a massage, and conversed over meals in the sun. This day really woke up something inside of me and filled me with so much love, appreciation, and CONNECTION. This is when I really became a key member in the Green Girl Gang. I wanted to share this connection and inspiration that I had acquired at this event. The rest is history. I am now a co-founder of the Green Girl Gang, and I continue to host events and connect women with each other in various outdoor and recreational hobbies.

The Green Girl Gang is a women's outdoor adventure group. This group does not discriminate, period. Everyone is welcome, even if your significant other wants to come. This group helps inspire and encourage women to get out there and recreate. This community of women helps to provide comfort to others who may not feel comfortable participating in recreational activities that traditionally

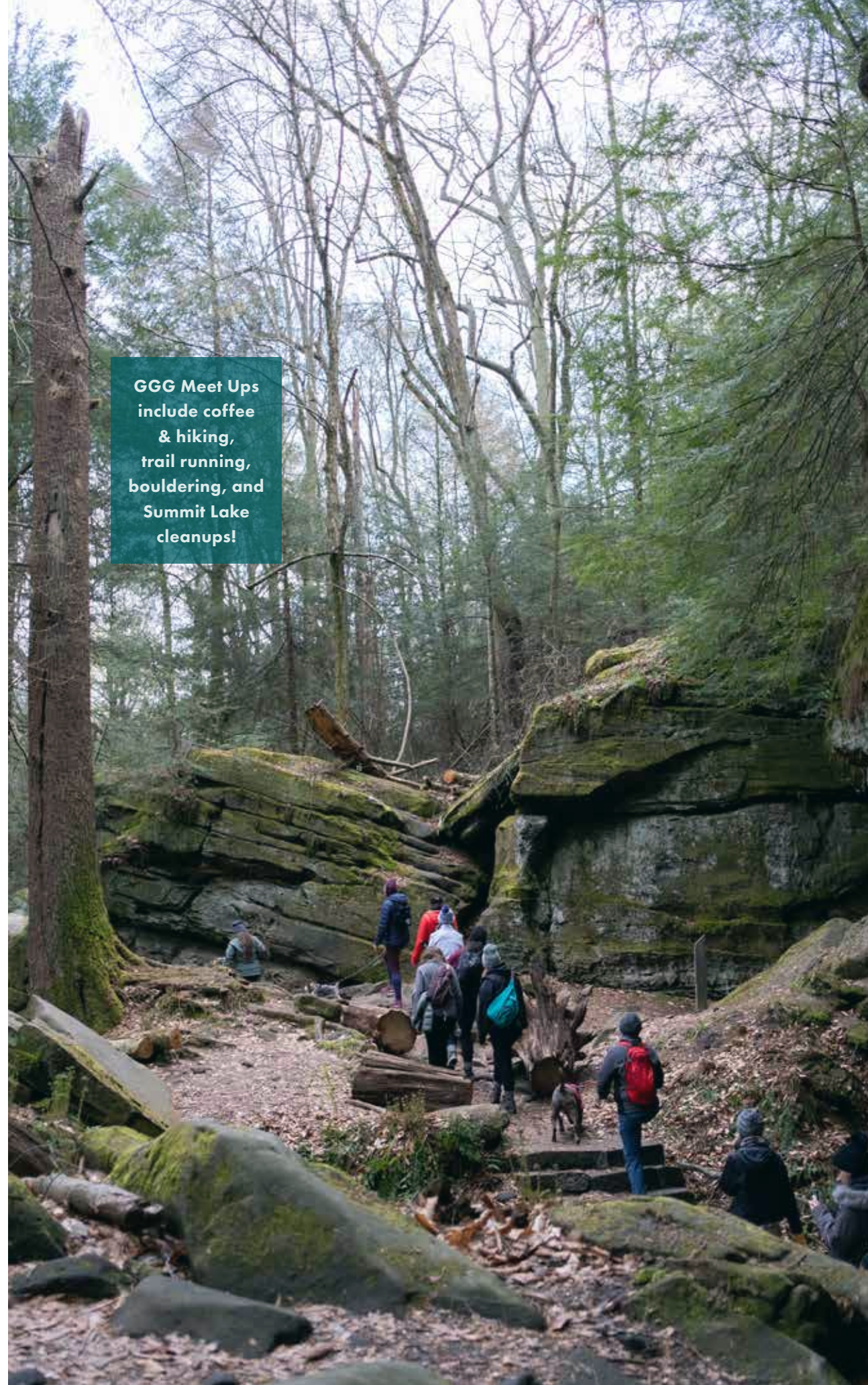
hold such a male-dominated presence. Events include anything from park cleanups and mountain biking, to rock climbing and camping.

There is nothing I enjoy more than when women reach out to me, expressing how thankful they are to have found a community that shares the same interests. Oftentimes we are so focused on physical health that we forget an important aspect of our overall wellbeing: social wellness. Having a strong social network shapes our mental, physical, and emotional health, and enhances our quality of life. Research has shown that people with healthy relationships respond better to stress, have fewer health issues, stronger immune systems, and may even live longer.

I didn't grow up seeing people like me in the outdoor community. We were essentially like unicorns. Being a Person of Color (POC) in the outdoor community has its uncomfortable moments from time to time. The sense of not feeling welcome, or that everyone is staring at you waiting for you to slip up or fail because of the color of your skin. They associate the color of skin with lack of experience or knowledge. I have always felt like I have to prove a point. Prove my worthiness of being present in the outdoor community.

Being a founder of this group has helped me to help women who may have felt the same way, or experienced certain unpleasant encounters. Women in the outdoors exist and we deserve to be represented. There is a severe lack of representation of women, and more so women of color. **But we are here, and we belong.**

GGG Meet Ups include coffee & hiking, trail running, bouldering, and Summit Lake cleanups!



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Green Girl Gang was originally founded by Jessica Suvak-Tran in 2016. Since then, the leadership baton has been handed off to Jennifer Daring in 2020. The entity of the group itself is still going through a bit of a transitional phase as it works on becoming more established and building a more diverse and inclusive foundation.

“We want everyone to feel welcome and to continue to grow and learn as a community,” said Jennifer. “We are all so strong, fearless, and unique in our own ways, and there is so much power to be expressed through the unification of women.”

READ FROM GIRLS IN THE GANG! —————→

FROM GIRLS IN THE GANG

WE ASKED FIVE GIRLS IN THE GANG THESE THREE QUESTIONS:

- 1. What has been your favorite GGG activity so far?
- 2. What is your favorite park or hiking trail in NE Ohio?
- 3. What does being in a group of like-minded women mean to you?



SOHA ELSAYED

- 1. This was my first meet up with Green Girl Gang. It was a great experience and I look forward to attending more GGG activities!
- 2. The Ledges is one of my favorite hiking trails. Here I'm immersed in all of Earth's beauty that God has provided for us. It's parks like these that I'm grateful for, where I am able to freely visit, be inevitably fascinated by its views, and truly feel connected with nature in a state of tranquility.
- 3. Being in a group of like-minded women is empowering. You feel like you belong, you are supported, you are comfortable to be around people who share your similarities as well as your individuality. Groups like GGG not only bring women who share similar interests and activities together, it provides a community where women from various backgrounds learn from one another and grow together. I see this as a means of linking people together who can help our world prosper.



EMMA SIMONE

- 1. Summit Lake cleanup
- 2. Tough one... I really love Hampton Hills (Summit Metro Parks) for hiking and like Kendall Lake (CVNP) as well for kayaking and fishing.
- 3. It is awesome to be able to meet more women who share the same hobbies and are super polite! It's been tough to meet new people that share the same hobbies and passions and this is an incredible group with friendly and encouraging people who are willing to give back to the community as well.



ABBEY MARSHALL

- 1. This was actually my first Green Girl Gang meet up. I moved to Akron last summer following graduation for a new job. Coming to a new place where I didn't know anyone during the pandemic was hard and I missed being around friends and other people who shared my same interests. I came across GGG on an Instagram post shared by my rock climbing gym here in Akron where they were hosting a meetup.
- 2. I'm not from around here so I haven't had the chance to explore everywhere yet, but I certainly took advantage of all the great parks and nature here with my dog during quarantine. I really love the Ledges trail at Cuyahoga Valley National Park because it's so unique, but I frequent Cascade Metro Park at least once a week closer to my house. It runs along the river and is beautiful throughout the entire year, and my dog loves it.
- 3. I was so glad to find the Green Girl Gang and hope to continue going to meet ups and getting to know the other members. It was so great to meet new people for the first time in a year outside of my job, and I had a great time talking to women who shared my interests. I love to be outdoors and explore, so finding friends who also value those things is really amazing. Beyond just recreation though, I love how GGG encourages community through their other initiatives, such as cleaning up Summit Lake in Akron. I am glad to be a part of that community.

SHOROOK ATTAR

- 1. My first GGG meetup was on Earth Day where we hiked at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. It was such a fun experience and I look forward to more outdoor events with the group.
- 2. Sand Run Metro Park—Mingo Trail
- 3. Being around like-minded women empowers me to do my best and keep pushing for equality and representation. I love nature and think everyone should get out there and experience it.



ILONA JUREWICZ & her dog, BEAR!

- 1. My favorite GGG activity so far is tough to pick, but probably rock climbing at Shaker Rocks. The Greens got me to go from bouldering to top rope climbing, and I ended up taking a belay certification class 2 weeks later because of it.
- 2. As an East-sider my favorite park is North Chagrin Reservation because of its versatility. You can go for a mile hike after work or string trails together to hike 6–8 miles in an afternoon.
- 3. GGG means everything. They say your vibe attracts your tribe, and that's true here. It's hard to meet new people. But we aren't just hanging out to hang out. We are genuinely interested in the activities we are participating in, and it's so easy to forge new friendships when you are having a good time. I look forward to events because I know I'm going to meet new Greens and make new connections every time I go.

STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH GGG EVENTS!
Follow their Instagram @thegreengirlgang or contact them at greengirlgangoutdoors@gmail.com!



SUPPORTING HEALTH & WELLNESS

**At The J.M. Smucker Co.,
we promote health and wellness
in all its many forms.**

In addition to providing a trusted food supply to nearly 90% of U.S. households, our partnerships with groups including the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park support our commitment to help create and strengthen access to community resources that encourage holistic wellness.

By supporting an appreciation for the many benefits of nature, and preserving our park system, we can ensure future generations have access to the resources vital to maintaining strong mental and physical health.



THE J.M. SMUCKER Co

CASCADE AUTO GROUP Champions Mental Health Program

Early in 2021, Cascade Auto Group launched a mental health program that trains staffers to recognize, understand, accept, and take action when it comes to mental health and suicide prevention. The program is titled *be nice™*, and it was developed by the Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan. It is gaining wide-spread popularity because of the increase in mental health problems associated with the isolation that accompanies lengthy lockdowns.

"This is an ambitious 12-month program," said Jennifer Rehs, used car sales administrator who is one of the champions of the roll-out. "About half of our staff has already embarked on the program, and we're introducing it to additional staff and new hires as they come on board." Jennifer added that mental health still has a stigma around it that needs to be broken. "Mental health needs to be talked about," she added.

Cascade Auto Group Managing Partner Michelle Primm learned about the program from a dealer in Michigan who lost a partner to suicide. Michelle applied for a grant to start the program, and the roll-out has been well-received by staff.

The "nice" part of the title is an acronym for four steps. The first is to Notice what is right and good about someone so you can notice when something is troubling them. Step two is to Invite yourself to check in with the individual who may need help. Step three is to Challenge the stigma around mental illness and to ask tough questions. And step four is to Empower yourself, knowing you can affect how a person thinks, acts and feels.

The program has video modules for training participants and to facilitate discussions. The ultimate goal is to transform employees, laying out an action plan to follow if they suspect someone is depressed and contemplating suicide.

Learn more about the program at www.benice.org.



CROOKED RIVER READS

A Distinguished Author Series

Join us for a new, virtual series as we host distinguished authors throughout 2021.

We'll explore the crucial impact connecting with nature has on human kind. Embark on a journey of self discovery, hike in someone else's shoes and explore the world from the comfort of a good book.

Learn about the authors and purchase tickets online at forcvnp.org/CRR



AUG 12
J.R. HARRIS



OCT 6
ANGELOU EZEILO



Find us in our new BOSTON STORE!

Recharge and refuel at Boston Store—the Conservancy's Trail Mix Boston operations have moved across the street! Stop by for CVNP merchandise and locally-made goodies after exploring nearby trails.

Here are some things you can do that are in close proximity of Boston Store:

- Rent a bike in Peninsula and travel along the Towpath Trail,
- View the scenic Cuyahoga River,
- Hop on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad from the Boston Mill Depot or Peninsula Depot,
- Hike, run, or walk to Lock 29.



Address: 1550 Boston Mills Rd W., Peninsula OH 44264

Hours: 9:30 AM - 6 PM, daily

SOCIAL

Every issue we feature your photos from inside the park. Follow us on Instagram @forcvnp for the next theme and share your photos with us to be featured in the next issue! #forcvnp



PHOTO BY:
YAZVISOALS,
YAZEN AMAWI

“Some of my all-time favorite summer days were spent at CVNP.”
— SAFA GHUMRAWI



PHOTO: MARGIE CARR

“The challenge of the hikes in the park this past winter were a welcome break from the world. I am 65-years-old and work full time in PPE. The calmness and ability to look at shadows, hike in single digits, and have some silliness was just the prescription for physical and mental wellbeing.” — MARGIE CARR



PHOTO: MARK & LESLIE MATHENY

“We have always been active with running and hiking on the Towpath, but never realized how much more there was to hiking in CVNP until we joined the hiking challenge. We have discovered numerous trails that we never knew existed.”
— MARK & LESLIE MATHENY, CUYAHOGA FALLS



PHOTO: SARAH LU

“I love visiting CVNP for all the different ways I can connect to nature. Some days I love spending all day on the trails, getting a good workout in. Other days I’ll find a quiet spot in the park to read, practice yoga, and recenter emotionally.” — SARAH LU



PHOTO:
LAUREN
FENIMORE

“I completed the full-on CVNP challenge this past Summer 2020... This photo was after my last trail run at Stanford House. It shows how my printed map and written directions of the last route of trails were so very used and barely made it! Running in CVNP has been oh so good for my soul!”
— LAUREN FENIMORE



PHOTO: RON SKINNER

Bike riding on the Towpath Trail. Photo taken at Station Road Bridge.

CREATURES



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forCVNP.org



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PHOTO: ZAINA SALEM