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Morgan Preserve latest link in growing network of Portage parks

Imagine yourself standing among 500 acres of serene forests, fields and wetlands. See the early morning mists floating from the surface of a lily-spattered pond as a red-headed woodpecker flies over.

Breathe deeply and feel the cool fall air in your lungs. Smell the gentle fall scent of decaying leaves in the woods. Feel a light rain begin to fall. The wetlands, fields and forests of the preserve filter the rainwater, helping to keep groundwater resources and the rivers and streams clean and healthy.

You are standing in the heart of the new Portage Park District Morgan Preserve that straddles the watershed divide between the Lake Erie and Ohio River drainages. Half of the raindrops that fall around you will begin a slow journey to the North Atlantic by way of the Cuyahoga River. The other half will eventually flow into the Mahoning River and will end up in the Gulf of Mexico.

When the Portage Park District held a dedication ceremony last month at the new Burton D. and Margaret Clark Morgan Preserve in Shalersville, they were doing much more than commemorating the preservation of an important piece of open space. The Portage Park District and its partners were celebrating an efficient, effective collaboration that protected over 500 acres of park land for the residents of Portage County at no cost to the park district or other county government agencies. One hundred percent of the funds used to purchase this preserve were raised from sources outside of Portage County.

Operated on a shoe-string budget, without the benefit of a dedicated tax levy, the Portage Park District makes this type of collaboration its standard operating procedure. Landowners, volunteers, private foundations, government grant sources, non-profit and other government partners all come together to make Portage County land conservation happen at the least cost and for the greatest benefit of the taxpayers.

While the Morgan Preserve will not be formally open to the public due to lack of operating funds at this time, it provides future opportunities for passive outdoor recreation such as birding, nature

GREEN

PORTAGE

Eddie Dengg
Portage Park District



observation, hiking, and outdoor education.

Parks like this provide a vital link to the economy of tomorrow. The up and coming generation will be made up of knowledge workers who are very conscious of lifestyle choices and quality of life issues. The most important issues to these people when deciding to relocate or stay in particular area are the amount and quality of open space available, whether there are nearby trail networks, and whether there are natural places to recharge and unwind.

Permanent open spaces like the new Morgan Preserve and the Chagrin Headwaters Preserve, like Townner's Woods and Dix Park, like Camp Spelman and Seneca Ponds Park are beginning to create a network of parks in Portage County that will help keep our brightest and best young people here. New graduates of Kent State University or Hiram College and other nearby institutions of higher learning will make the conscious decision to stay here for the quality of life, rather than to relocate to areas in search of these amenities.

Our Portage Park District will be a key part of building in the county's future economy while at the same time protecting our drinking water resources, as well as the area's scenic beauty and diverse wildlife.

If you have a chance today, this weekend, or any evening before the snow starts to fly, get outside and explore one of the Portage County Park District's wonderful parks. More information can be found at www.portageparkdistrict.org.

Eddie Dengg is vice president of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and serves on the board of the Natural Areas Association. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier.