

# OUTLOOK

## THE HILLSIDE TRUST

Autumn, 2021

Volume XL Issue

### Finalists set for Second Annual Pope Coleman Awards

The Hillside Trust is excited to announce its finalists for the second annual Pope Coleman Awards. The four finalists include, Bill Hopple, Brewster Rhoads, and Jim and the late Eileen Schenk.

#### Bill Hopple

As its longest serving executive director, Bill Hopple guided the Cincinnati Nature Center (CNC) for 23 years before retiring in 2019. Under his leadership, CNC experienced significant growth in membership, income, and in its number of employees. Prior to joining CNC, Bill served as the director of development at Cincinnati Country Day school. Currently, Bill is

the president of the Cardinal Land Conservancy, a non-profit whose mission is to preserve natural habitats, waterways, agricultural lands, and open space in Southwest Ohio.

#### Brewster Rhoads

No stranger to the environmental and political community, Brewster Rhoads is a former executive director of Green Umbrella, a sustainability alliance of local environmental organizations serving the metropolitan region. An avid kayaker and swimmer, Brewster established The Ohio River Paddlefest in 1999. It is an annual event that is recognized as the nation's largest paddling celebration,

with 2000 participants traveling 9 miles through downtown Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky in canoes, kayaks, and other human-powered craft. Brewster has also managed or provided strategic advice on more than 150 candidate and issue campaigns in Southwest Ohio.

#### Jim and Eileen Schenk

Jim and Eileen Schenk have established an impressive resume of citizen action and environmental activism in Cincinnati's Price Hill community. In 1978, they founded Imago, an ecological non-profit whose mission is to model sustainable living and to foster a deeper connection with and appreciation for Earth. Several years later, Jim and Eileen helped form the Western Wildlife Corridor (WWC), a non-profit nature conservancy whose mission includes the protection of habitat along the Ohio River Valley from the Mill Creek to the Indiana State line.

Around the same time WWC was formed, Jim and Eileen launched Price Hill Will in response to community input about needs and desires for the

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**The Anderson Pavilion along The Banks**

# The Public Steps of Cincinnati

By Eric Russo, and Christian Huelsman, executive director, Spring in Our Steps

As a city of hillsides, Cincinnati had to adapt to its topographic challenges in creative ways. Early on, its population was confined primarily to the Basin, consisting of its downtown core and such neighborhoods as Over-the-Rhine. The population was densely packed in, and Cincinnati was known as one of the densest and most polluted cities in the 19th century. Footpaths were established on many of the hillsides that towered over the Basin. Eventually, these were replaced by wood steps and stone steps. Later they were improved with pre-cast concrete risers.

Towards the end of the 1800s, various modes of transportation evolved, including trolley car lines that originated in the Basin and terminated at many of these steps. Five different inclined railways were also built that could move larger amounts of people and goods from the valley to the hilltops.

With the advent of technological changes in mass transportation, Cincinnati undertook a public staircase building program that not only connected the Basin to its surrounding hilltops, but other valley floors to their hilltops across the city. Many of these staircases were laid out under the famous Kessler Plan, and later constructed during the Works Project Administration of the Great Depression.

Inventories undertaken by the City of Cincinnati indicate that the city has just under 400 sets of public staircases. Some of these have been well-maintained and

serve a vital pedestrian link within their respective communities. Two of the most well-known of these steps include the Main Street Steps that connect Mt. Auburn with Over-the-Rhine, and the series of public staircases that connect Riverside Drive with Mt. Adams, that are used each year during the Good Friday Pilgrimage to the Holy Cross Immaculata Parish. Other public steps have fallen into significant disrepair and near abandonment, as automobile transportation proliferated over the last half century.

In 1998, Mary Anna DuSablon wrote, Walking the Steps of Cincinnati, a Guide to the Queen City's Scenic and Historic Secrets. This book catalogued each of Cincinnati's public staircases in a way that allowed readers to discover these walking treasures for themselves.

## SPRING IN OUR STEPS

In 2012, the non-profit organization, Spring in Our Steps was founded, with the mission of bringing a renewed and brighter future to the city's public alleys and public stairways. Through cleanup, programming, advocacy, and preservation, it has initiated over 200 events focused on improving conditions along brick-paved alleys and public stairways that are nestled in the hillsides.

Beginning in Mt. Auburn, Spring in Our Steps took on the cleanup of St. Joe and Wendell Alleys. With long-term ambitions to seek the reopening of the public stairway closed for more than 25 years, it orchestrated a 2.5 mile walk of stairways and alleys, with live music, installation art, and food

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**Sharp Alley Steps Tour, photo courtesy of Christian Huelsman**

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the neighborhood. In 2004, Price Hill Will become its own entity as a non-profit organization. That same year, Jim and Eileen formally began the process of incorporating their street, Enright Avenue as the Enright Ridge Urban Ecovillage. Sadly Eileen, Jim's partner of 51 years, passed away in December of 2020.

Please mark your calendars for Thursday April 21, 2022 where these four individuals will be honored at the Anderson Pavilion opposite Smale Park. Tickets will go on sale in early 2022.

**Annual Meeting Set for October 21st**

The Hillside Trust has set the date for its annual meeting on Thursday October 21st. Similar to last year's meeting, this one will be convened virtually via the Zoom platform. The meeting will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour, and it will begin at 5:30pm.

As of this writing, The Hillside Trust is reaching out to the Cincinnati Herpetological Society to see if they could provide a guest speaker to talk about amphibian and reptile habitats in our region. Since our hillsides are often the last frontier of un-

developed areas, many amphibian and reptile habitats can be found in these locations.

If you would like to join this year's annual meeting, email [eric.hillside@fuse.net](mailto:eric.hillside@fuse.net) in order to receive a Zoom link to the meeting. Thank you and see you then!

**Public Steps, from page 2**

and beverages along the way. In 2018 and 2019, in partnership with ArtWorks and Pendleton Neighborhood Council, and with help from a City of Cincinnati Safe and Clean Grant, Bolivar Alley was transformed from a trash-filled recess into a beautiful chute filled with murals and street art. Since 2012, Spring in Our Steps has cleaned up alleys and public steps in over 20 neighborhoods including, Northside, South Fairmount, Over-the-Rhine, and Clifton Heights.

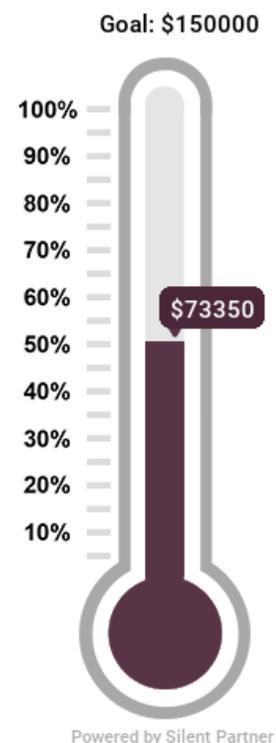
More recently, the role of Spring in Our Steps has broadened to include research and advocacy. Increasingly, alleys have become gated and staircases closed, due to pressures from private developers and a long-held stigma about the perceived safety of enclosed corridors that depart from streets bustling with vehicular traffic.

In an era when many urban areas across America are redis-

covering their historical roots and sense of place, with less emphasis on planning for automobiles, a return to pedestrian-scale circulation is gaining popularity. As Spring in Our Steps continues to develop tools for navigating the city along lesser-known paths, it hopes to mobilize communities with a broader sense of how to get around on foot.

Spring in Our Steps is eager to build upon existing partnerships and foster new ones, in order to encourage both the celebration and use of Cincinnati's impressive and extensive walking network. The Hillside Trust appreciates the important work if this organization, and it is pleased to endorse its efforts. The Hillside Trust also looks forward to partnering with Spring in Our Steps, especially in areas where the Trust has conserved hillside lands that are adjacent to abandoned or underutilized public steps, such as in North Fairmount.

**The Hillside Trust needs your support to reach its fundraising goal of \$150,000 in 2021.**



**Reflects funds raised through September 3, 2021**



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**34-acre Carder Dolwick Preserve in Hebron, KY**