

OPRA connection

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2018 OPRA Awards of Excellence

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EDUCATE. ADVOCATE. COLLABORATE.

the House Great Lakes Task Force, Kaptur has consistently championed full funding of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



The Jack Hanna Resource Conservation Award winner is Tim Gallaher of Metroparks Toledo. Gallaher has over 21 years of committed service with

Ohio park districts, including five years with the Wood County Park District and 16 plus years with Metroparks Toledo. He is an innovative leader in natural resources management, and currently oversees habitat restoration and management of over 12,000 acres of park land for Metroparks Toledo, within one of the most biologically diverse areas of Ohio, including the Oak Openings and Lake Erie coastal marsh regions. Gallaher is directly responsible for the restoration of more Oak Openings habitats than any other Ohio park professional, restoring over 1,500 acres of degraded and previously unmanaged habitat. A strong advocate for reforestation, Gallaher has directly overseen the planting of more than 95,000 trees across the park district over the past 15 years.



Our 2018 Youth Sports Coach of the Year is Ed Krause of the city of Reynoldsburg. Krause began his volunteer youth sports coaching career in the 1970s. De-

spite not knowing any of the rules or strategies, he found himself as the head coach of his daughter's first soccer team in 1978. He continued to coach both his daughters' soccer and softball teams through their youth and into the 1990s, when his granddaughters took up soccer. Most recently, Krause coached his middle granddaughter, Rachael, thus taking on a whole new generation of players to mentor. Over this time span, Krause has been the head coach in a

variety of age divisions ranging from 6 and under, to 14 and under, for both boys and girls. Perhaps most notable of all of his volunteer roles has been his commitment and dedication to the Superhero Soccer program, which Krause helped grow into the thriving program it is today. Superhero Soccer is an adaptive soccer program for children with disabilities. Krause has been imperative in the coaching of the "superheroes," as he calls them, and the training of youth to become shadow coaches.



The 2018 winner of the Outstanding Youth Leadership Award is Ella Oswalt of the city of Gahanna. After attending an Earth Day event at Woodside Green

Park, Oswalt guided Girl Scout Troop 678, of which she is a member, in partnering with Gahanna Parks & Recreation to create the Woodside Green Explore and Play area. Oswalt presented the idea to redevelop part of Woodside Green into a natural play area. Oswalt was inspired by other local parks outside of Gahanna that had natural play areas and saw a specific need in Gahanna to, "get kids off of electronics," and she Woodside Green was a perfect fit. She presented her idea to the city, and was a leader in project development, fundraising and even scheduling volunteers for workdays at the park. The vine-cutting ceremony was covered by local TV stations, and the new play area has provided a much-needed update to one of Gahanna's most scenic parks and has far exceeded expectations. Oswalt is a 12-year-old sixth-grader at Middle School West in the Gahanna Jefferson School District and is a member of Girl Scout Troop 678.

OPRA is pleased to recognize two 2018 Citizens of the Year.



Citizen of the Year **Greg Lashutka** has been a member of the Columbus and Franklin County Board of Park Commissioners for more than 10

years. Lashutka and his fellow park commissioners have set strong direction and vision standards that have continued to make Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks the number one attraction in central Ohio. During his tenure on the Board, Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks opened five parks, added 4,000 acres of land and 50 miles of trails and took over operations of 90 miles of Central Ohio Greenways trails. The former mayor of Columbus, Lashutka was instrumental in the continued development of the city's recreation and parks department. Columbus' Gregory S. Lashutka Event Center is a lasting tribute to his work there.



Citizen of the Year **Andy Niekamp** is on a mission to connect people with the region's trails through outdoor recreation opportunities and education. He's the founder

of the region's most active recreation group, Dayton Hikers, and champion of the trails throughout the southwestern Ohio region and the state. A trailblazer on and off the trails, Niekamp has been a lifelong user and supporter of Five Rivers MetroParks. Dedicating his life to creating more trail enthusiasts and improving the trail experience, Niekamp has grown the Dayton Hikers to more than 5,000 members during the past nine years. Going by the trail name "Captain Blue," Niekamp hikes thousands of miles each year. In 2017, Niekamp worked with the Buckeye Trail Association on funding for a bridge and boardwalk at Eastwood MetroPark on the Buckeye Trail. His relationship with the Buckeye Trail Association grew after 2011, when he hiked the entire 1,444-mile trail.