

TRAIL BLAZER

PASSION FOR RECREATION FUELS SHARON MULLINS' VOLUNTEERISM

Sharon Mullins is no stranger to the MetroParks, but for the last two years, she has taken her appreciation for nature to a new level—engaging in volunteerism. “I had done (frontcountry) camping my whole life, but I wanted to try something a little more intense, so I went through the backpacking progression (offered through the Outdoor Recreation Department),” Mullins recalls. “We started out on short trips and eventually made our way to hike the Appalachian Trail. That got my bug for hiking the A-T started.”

From her passion for the outdoors sprang a desire to give back, and today, not only does Mullins lead group hikes, she’s a member of the MetroParks volunteer patrol (MVP). Mullins says the transition was natural to go from an enthusiastic participant to a volunteer. “I figured, if I’m in the parks anyway, I might as well help out.” Mullins says she enjoys the interaction with the public, whether she’s on a hike or helping out at an event like this October’s GearFest. “It’s always nice to network and meet new people who share similar interests as you,” she says.


Learning opportunities are another reason Mullins continues her efforts as a volunteer. “The great thing about volunteering is that I’m always learning,” she says. “There are lots of opportunities to learn something new, like CPR or wilderness rescue.”

Even on her “days off” as a volunteer, you’re likely to catch Mullins in the parks. She says the MetroParks’ premier facilities coupled with the support and training she receives from the Outdoor Recreation Department give her the



confidence and knowledge she needs to “get out and live” every day. “The frequency and variety of (outdoor recreation) programming is incredible,” she says. “(The Outdoor Recreation Department’s) graduated programs help you make the steps from just letting you try it out to taking group trips. They set things up so you can develop skills at your own pace and lead you toward independence where you can do these cool things on your own.”

Mullins has a bit of advice for anyone considering making a lifestyle change to a more healthy, active one—get outside! “Go see what these parks have to offer, or get started in a progressive course. Events (like GearFest) are great ways to try out an outdoor activity. It’s free; you get instruction and get to practice before you make any kind of investment,” she says.

Those who are ready to take their skills to the next level should consider volunteering. “Being an MVP gives you access to free training, networking and interacting with the public, and you really feel like you can make a difference in the parks,” she says. “Not only will you help make the parks safer and help visitors have a more enjoyable experience, it will lead you to a healthier lifestyle.” 

OUTDOOR VOLUNTEERING

Those who might be new to volunteering or would like to make a “test run” should consider a trail-building day or adopt-a-campsite day. These volunteer opportunities do not require any long-term commitment and teach you about important conservation principles. Turn to page 39 for upcoming trail building and adopt-a-campsite days.



IN MEMORIAM

This spring, Five Rivers MetroParks lost a member of its family when Bernadette Harawa passed away. Bernadette began her career at MetroParks in 1997 as a member of the marketing team when she was just 23 years old. She later took her expertise to human resources and volunteers. She loved working with the volunteers—seeing their excitement for the outdoors grow and helping them learn about the natural world around us.

Bernadette grew up in Dayton and loved to hike the MetroParks. Taylorsville and Carriage Hill were two of her favorites. She was also attracted to the diversity and culture she found at Island and RiverScape MetroParks as well as the PNC 2nd Street Market. She would often take friends and their children to the Children’s Discovery Garden at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark.

A memorial to Bernadette has been placed at Dull Woods along the Wolf Creek Rail Trail. This beautiful spot, with its tall trees, remind us of Bernadette’s love of nature and the strength of her spirit. Bernadette was an energetic and inspiring member of our team who constantly challenged us to serve the public well and to take care of the land we cherish. She was so proud to work at Five Rivers MetroParks. We lost her too soon, and we miss her dearly.