

PURPOSE AND MISSION STATEMENT

Our purpose is to be organized and at all times operate exclusively for charitable purposes of Epworth Park within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Our mission is to preserve and promote Epworth Park's historical, cultural, and educational past by maintaining and improving the park's buildings and grounds, while fostering an educational/cultural presence in the community through gatherings that will be available for all to enjoy.

BRIEF HISTORY OF EPWORTH PARK

Epworth Park, or the “Garden of Oaks”, was established in 1870 as a Methodist Campground — a place for spiritual fellowship, instruction, and renewal.

The Camp Meetings were immediately successful, and by the year 1875 the weekend crowds arriving by horse-drawn wagons and trains often numbered 10,000 to 15,000. Along with the popularity and success of the Camp Meetings came the need for meeting accommodation and housing for the attendees. The cottages were built between 1870 and 1900, by people from nearby towns, as a weekend retreat from city life. A hotel was also built during this time, near the current site of the concession stand, which provided inexpensive room and board for the growing number of guests. The auditorium was built also on its present site, and the lake was also constructed, adding to the beauty of the park, and providing water activities such as swimming and boating.

In the early 1900's, the Camp Meetings were replaced by the Chautauqua movement — a huge, national movement which began at the Methodist retreat on Chautauqua Lake, New York. The Chautauqua assemblies were grand affairs, attracting the most famous actors, musicians, and lecturers of the time. The roster of talent was a “Who's Who” list, including William Jennings Bryan, and many others. The Chautauqua movement reached its peak in the mid-1920's, but by the 1950's, it was replaced by new, more modern forms of entertainment. Today, the park celebrates the Chautauqua Homecoming during the second weekend in July.





BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHAUTAUQUA MOVEMENT

The word “chautauqua” is Iroquois and means either “two moccasins tied together” or “jumping fish.” Whatever the precise meaning, it’s clear the word described a lake in western New York which by the Civil War was known as Chautauqua Lake. In 1874, John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller rented the site of a Methodist camp meeting to use in the post-camp meeting season as a summer school for Sunday school teachers; this became known as the Chautauqua Institution. This reflected a nation-wide interest in the professionalization of teaching. They were very clear that their intent was educational, rather than revivalist. It should be stressed that the Chautauqua Institution was never affiliated with any one denomination; pretty much every faith group in the U.S. has a chapel or building on the grounds today. Still, the sort of mild Protestantism that has informed much of American culture was an underpinning of the Chautauqua Movement.

Chautauqua is experiencing a renaissance and people are discovering that lifelong learning is one of the keys to living a happy, fulfilling life. The demand for authentic cultural experiences is growing. Chautauqua communities are beginning to thrive and be resurrected from the past and Epworth Park would like to follow that trend.

EVOLUTION OF EPWORTH PARK

Until 2018, the Methodist Church East Ohio Conference owned the entire park, including the land the cottages were built on, the auditorium/chapel, and the Epworth Center.

The church was interested in divesting itself of the park, except the Epworth Center, and offered to sell the remaining land to cottage owners. The Village of Bethesda previously purchased the south-side property and the lake and has built a top-notch recreational area with playground equipment and shelters.

The cottage owners organized and created a certified homeowners association that covers the land the cottages reside on, the community cottage, the auditorium, the oak grove, and the land down to the lake shore.

Epworth Park continues today to provide a place of peace, solitude, and family. Cottages are owned primarily by folks, mostly retirees, who are originally or currently from the Upper Ohio Valley.

Cottages are passed down generation to generation by families who have deep roots and fond memories growing up and visiting their relatives during the summer. Some are purchased by those who grew up in the area and attended church camp at the park while a youth. Others just stumble upon the park while visiting the area.





EPWORTH PARK FOUNDATION

The Epworth Park Foundation Board was created in 2024 as a 501c3 non-profit organization to be responsible for raising funds via donations, grants, benefactors, etc. to support Epworth Park in accordance with its mission.

SPECIFIC GOALS:

- To preserve and promote Epworth Park’s historical, cultural and educational past
- To improve infrastructure, including but not limited to upgrading the water and electrical lines
- To improve the usability of the outdoor auditorium
- To develop and foster an educational and cultural presence in the county of Belmont
- To ensure the integrity of the Garden of Oaks and other garden areas throughout the park

BOARD MEMBERS:

- Doug Frizzi, President 740-310-2800
- Shawn Core, Treasurer 740-312-9114
- June Diehl, Secretary 740-513-0400
- Steven Avdakov, Member 305-761-3642
- Chad Moore, Member 740-581-2001

We are seeking additional board members that can bring to us expertise in grant procurement, legal professionals, educators and individuals interested in preserving our heritage and help us to prepare for the future. Please contact any board member to express your interest.

We invite you to visit our website: www.epworthpark.org or scan this QR code for digitized copies of tonight’s material.

