

EARTH DAY

by Ray Patacca, INTERPRETATION & EDUCATION MANAGER

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 18, LAKE METROPARKS joins the world in celebrating the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. The original Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, and was the result of many social, political and ecological events that shaped the world's attitude about the environment.

The concept of Earth Day was developed by Senator Gaylord Nelson in 1969 when he proposed a national grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment. The time was right. Rachel Carlson's Silent Spring was being widely read, grass roots organizing and teach-ins had been developed by many of the 1960s "movements." Cleveland, unwittingly, played a role when, in 1969, the Cuyahoga River caught fire. The fire spurred action because it was featured in one of the most widely read issues of Time Magazine. Later in the same year, a bill passed Congress to create the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). President Nixon addressed the need for environmental protection in his 1970 State of the Union speech. These events set the stage for a tremendous outcry on behalf of the environment.

The protest came loud and clear on April 22, 1970, when 20 million people throughout the country celebrated the very first Earth Day. As a young college student, I remember taking part in Earth Day at Cleveland State University. What impressed me was the fervor and sense of commitment to change in the air. And change did occur. Although few Earth Day celebrations were held over the next 20 years, the nation's environmental conscience

was awakened and much progress was made. During that time environmental legislation was passed on the local, state and national levels including the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts.

In 1990, Denis Hayes, a major organizer of the first Earth Day, launched a campaign for new Earth Day celebrations. That year 200 million people, 141 nations and nearly 5,000 environmental groups from around the world celebrated Earth Day. Lake Metroparks became involved by hosting an Earth Day celebration for nearly 2,000 people at Penitentiary Glen Reservation. The Earth Day Coalition was formed and environmental awareness was alive and growing.

Celebrations flourished in the years that followed. Since Earth Day's revival in 1990, Lake Metroparks has hosted many Earth Day events. Our concerted effort to promote the event expanded in 2002 with activities at both Penitentiary Glen Reservation and Farmpark, each offering its own perspective. Today Farmpark highlights land management issues, farmland preservation and renewable energy sources while Penitentiary Glen focuses on wildlife and habitat preservation. Both offer family games and science activities. Farmpark has also partnered with bicycling and running clubs in hopes of getting people outdoors and developing an understanding of how we are connected to the earth.

The impact of Earth Day can be measured by the progress we make to conserve earth and its resources. The value of the day is the attitude it fosters in our hearts. As Baba Dioum, a West African conservationist, stated at the 1968 general assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature...

“ In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught. ”

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