

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of Prospect and Goshen

SEPTEMBER 2018

NORTH OLDHAM NEIGHBORS

Tavia Cathcart
Brown

INSPIRES OUR COMMUNITY
WITH HER LOVE OF NATURE

Photos by Felicia Marx Photography



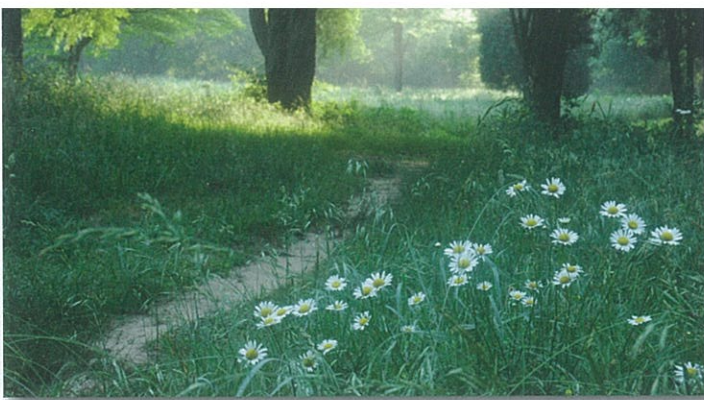
Resident FEATURE

CREASEY MAHAN:

A Magical Place of Natural Wonders

BY HEATHER MUELLER Photos by Felicia Marx Photography





Photos submitted by Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve

Behind a Successful Nature Preserve Stands, One Tough as Nails Lady Who Has Brought So Much Joy To The Community.

It takes a special lady with southern charm and a love of nature to bring joy to so many people. Even though she was born in Nashville and grew up in Tennessee, the hazel eyed beauty, Tavia Cathcart Brown, has made more of an impact on the people in North Oldham than she may ever realize. Her enthusiasm and work as an interpretive naturalist, writer, teacher, author, television personality and advocate of environmental preservation has made such a positive effect on so many people within the community and beyond. "I'd like to think we all experience a childlike sense of joy when we are surrounded by nature," Tavia shared. "For me, the outdoors has always satisfied my cravings for adventure. I feel alive, vital and most happy when I'm connected to nature and I love to share that feeling with everyone I can."

For over 10 years Tavia has been the Executive Director of Goshen's breathtaking 170-acre Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve established in

1975. She prides herself on, "Bringing Nature and Community Together." The preserve which attracted over 48,000 visitors last year is a hidden gem nestled amongst beautiful horse farms, neighborhood homes and subdivisions. People have direct access to the preserve 365 days a year, from dawn to dusk. The property has 9.5 miles of winding wooded hiking trails complete with a variety of trees, wildflowers, shrubs, woodlands, wetlands and meadows filled with native grasses. There are four natural year-round springs on the property, ponds and rolling streams. One can enjoy a waterfall, a two-acre native Woodland Garden with over 118 species of ferns and 172 types of wildflowers, shrubs and trees complete with shaded benches and picnic tables. In addition, there are covered picnic areas and the new Forest Friends Playground which

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features oversized whimsical play animals found in the forest including an 11-foot long orange newt and a six foot turtle. There are also several camping areas, a fire pit, as well as many open areas that are just perfect for flying a kite.

It's remarkable when you realize that with all the educational programs and events at Creasey Mahan, the Nature Preserve is a public charity and does not receive a single penny of tax dollars for operational support. That's what makes the work Tavia does so special. Through grant writing and community fundraisers Tavia and her team have worked to raise money to fund projects like the whimsical, handicap accessible Forest Friends Playground installed last year while they continue to manage the entire operations at the preserve. Tavia is greatly appreciative of all the help and donations received including the incredible support from Judge Executive David Voegelé, our Magistrates as well as the North Oldham Fire Department who work extremely hard to keep everyone healthy and safe at Creasey Mahan.

There are seven buildings on the property including the beautiful Mahan Manor built in 1805, a limestone Springhouse originally used to store milk, fruits and vegetables and a Fieldhouse that opens up to a beautiful vista of rolling hills which may be rented for birthday parties, meetings or special events. You can also find the Mahan Oldham County Library on the property which was the original Mahan's dairy and tobacco barn. Creasey Mahan is the legacy of the late Virginia Creasey Mahan and Howard Mahan who vowed to preserve it for future generations. Today it has become the heart and home of the community.

Imagine driving to work and being greeted by a baby fawn peeking out from beneath a tree branch, or field sparrows singing from majestic trees. Every day is a unique experience for Tavia. "I love to see butterflies dancing throughout wildflower gardens or turtles basking on logs in the morning sun," she recalls. One can learn about the biological diversity and natural environments of Kentucky at the Creasey Mahan Nature Center and there is a special play area and activities for toddlers. A staff of five employees at Creasey serve many local counties and provide educational programs to 90 schools and organizations. They conduct environmentally based nature hikes, field trips, classes and customized programs. Their sum-

mer camps for preschool through sixth grade offer so much fun, kids don't even realize they are learning. Outreach programs are also offered and target underprivileged children and those in foster care. Kids may meet up with flying squirrels, watch green Heron birds snatch fish from ponds, collect frogs from different life stages, examine bee colonies and learn about native owls and bats that make Creasey Mahan their home.

"I absolutely love what I do," Tavia admitted. "And I've spent my life educating people of all ages about our place within the natural world in which we live." She's convinced the more children are exposed to nature at an early age, the more they advance intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically and even spiritually. Tavia cites a book entitled "The Last Child in the Woods," in which author Richard Louv identifies the nature-deficit disorder. In the book he defends the importance of exposure to nature so children can learn to be more creative in their problem solving skills, develop a greater sense of confidence, courage and better focus, all while improving their overall health and reducing stress.

Tavia is a teacher and naturalist at heart and her goal is to continue to share her knowledge every day to motivate others to become more aware of the environment and discuss ways to act responsibly to maintain it. At Creasey Mahan she teaches about topics that include: wildflowers, pollinators, the ecosystems, water cycles, fossils, global warming, conservation, recycling, plant life cycles, animal habitats and the food web. She loves to give presentations and conducts speaking engagements outside of Creasey Mahan. Tavia has spent over eight years writing two books and is currently working on her third. The first book she co-authored was *The Wildflowers of Tennessee*, the Ohio Valley and the Southern Appalachians. It covers 1,250 species across 16 states and

has 800 color photos. The book has sold 30,000 copies and a new printing will be available soon. The second book is a coffee-table style book that won the 2011 Gold Nautilus Book Award entitled *Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest*. Tavia wrote the natural history sections and took the majority of photos. All the proceeds from both books were donated to charitable causes. Tavia's writings have also been published in national and regional journals, anthologies and conservation magazines.

Her parents have been credited for helping Tavia become such a well-respected teacher of nature. In fact, they have always been a big inspiration for everything she's done. Her father is a retired English teacher, Stage Development Director for the Country Music industry and Theatre Director who was well known for many theatre productions in Nashville, TN. Tavia grew up around the stage and also admired her mother who was a teacher as well as a lifelong learner who received her Ph.D. when she was 70! Tavia chuckled as she remembered her first stage appearance was when she was seven years old in her father's production of *Hello Dolly*. She went on to act growing up and a fun fact about Tavia is that she later appeared in two major motion pictures; *The Chilling* in 1989, and *Mrs. Doubtfire* in 1993.

Tavia has had a love of nature since she was a young child. She remembers falling in love with flowers as she crawled through her grandmother's Zinnia floral garden. Today she admits, "My connection with nature has been the

"My goal as Executive Director has been to create a community where everyone feels that he or she belongs, where we cultivate curiosity and inquisitiveness and people may enjoy a place of beauty."

—Tavia Cathcart Brown, Executive Director, Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve.



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longest lasting love affair of my life and truly a great blessing."

However, in June, 2012, Tavia chose to also share her love with a handsome man named Matthew Brown and they were married amongst friends and family under a Mulberry tree on the 400 acre farm where they live. Tavia was introduced to Matt by a mutual friend and she actually took him "bushwhacking through the forest" on their first date. He passed the test and soon she realized his love of nature was a match for hers. And after 20 years in the logistics field, Matt chose to manage their homestead and he works on the farm where they live.

"Matt makes me feel like the luckiest lady alive. People often roll their eyes when they see how madly in love we are with each other and our two year old rescue, Corabelle, who we named after one of our favorite flowers." The couple has a great deal of fun traveling and is particularly drawn to visit botanical gardens and national parks. Currently Tavia is helping to design the Education Gardens for the new Botanical Gardens scheduled to open in Louisville next year.

For fun they enjoy taking long walks and photographing wildflowers, working in the garden to support pollinators like birds, butterflies and bees, harvesting fruits and vegetables and then cooking together. Their garden has already become an important waystation for migrating Monarch butterflies and there are two additional certified waystations at Creasey Mahan. Since 98% of Monarch caterpillars don't survive in the wild, they grow milkweed plants to host them and work to ensure their survival. Then they identify, tag and release the Monarchs before they head south for the winter and eventually migrate to 12 mountain peaks located west of Mexico City. Tavia has visited all four of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserves in the volcanic belt of the Sierra Madre Mountains

on the border of Michoacán and the State of Mexico. She enjoys speaking about her adventures and what can be done to help the butterflies survive. Their migration patterns continue to fascinate many and so much can be learned about them at Creasey Mahan.

In 2018, Tavia launched a new venture serving as host, garden consultant and writer of Kentucky's Secret Gardens for Kentucky Educational Television that premiered this past summer and continues to be replayed. The show produced by Teresa Day was designed to inspire viewers to beautify their surroundings and featured gardens across the state starting with Matt and Tavia's personal cottage garden that features milkweed, columbines, foxgloves, catmint, bee balm, bluestar, lilies, cold-hardy hibiscus, yellow wood poppies, zinnias and a vegetable plot complete with heirloom tomatoes—Tavia's favorite! The show continues with more formal Kentucky gardens, both large and small, rural and urban including one owned by the late mystery writer and Kentucky native,

Sue Grafton and her husband Steve Humphrey on their 1912 estate. They have received positive reviews on both the show and Tavia as a host. Teresa is optimistic they will produce another segment in the near future. "I hope the show will inspire viewers to beautify their surroundings," Tavia says, "We share tips for everyone whether you have a tiny "pocket" patio garden or an expanded garden that incorporates many native plants that support birds, bees and butterflies."

Overall, Creasey Mahan has been an essential resource to the community for decades and Tavia



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The Nature Preserve is a perfect scenic destination for a wedding along the majestic tree-lined Mahan Lane or on one of the two arched bridges in the Woodland Garden. Photo by Felicia Marx Photography

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looks forward to increasing the visibility of the Nature Preserve, growing their programs and building partnerships with other local organizations and nonprofits. She supports other nonprofits by offering the use of booths at Creasey Mahan, free of charge. "I'm a firm believer in partnering with and helping other charitable organizations and even for-profit businesses to help grow our community," Tavia shared. "Our goal is to inspire the love of nature, while cultivating environmental understanding and stewardship among our community."

Every year with the help of volunteers, fabulous events are held at Creasey Mahan. Last year they tracked their volunteers dedicated over 5,000 hours to support their programs! Volunteers not only helped with their events, they also worked in the gardens, the office and even helped plant trees and shrubs. "We would not be able to offer so many services without the generosity of time, expertise and donations our volunteers make each and every year," Tavia assured us. Another great source of volunteers has been from students who have required community service hours as well as the local scouts whose Eagle Scout and Gold Award projects have led them to do some fabulous projects for Creasey Mahan.

The maintenance at Creasey Mahan is an ongoing project and a major goal they also have right now is to deal with the Ash trees that have been attacked by the Emerald Ash Borer beetle. They have over 2,000 dead Ash trees in their forested areas. They have removed ones that impact the safety of their visitors and are leaving some for wildlife purposes; however they still have a multi-year project ahead. Once the trees are removed they must prevent invasive plants from moving in and replant trees and shrubs.

Tavia serves on the boards of the Oldham County Tourism Commission and the Louisville Audubon Society and considers herself a lifetime student of the natural world. Besides the incredible diversity, intricacy and interconnection we find in nature, what Tavia loves most is the peace and tranquility she finds while walking through the forests. "The natural world always amazes me when I take time to notice—from the tiniest beetle on a sunflower to the soaring Red Shouldered Hawk and the footprint of a fox beside a creek. I invite you to take a walk at Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve and make your own discoveries. I look forward to seeing you on the trail." ~ Tavia

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THESE ANNUAL EVENTS ON YOUR CALENDAR; They've brought so many together through the years.

AUGUST- PET DAY "Woofstock" and Butterfly Day –FREE event run for nine years thanks to Goshen Animal Clinic.

SEPTEMBER- Many of the local schools practice their sports at Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve for they have both a baseball field and recreational field. Also, the North Oldham High and Middle School Cross Country host the annual "Rumble Through the Jungle" Invitionals each September at Creasey Mahan which attracts thousands of people of all ages.

OCTOBER- THE 14TH ANNUAL HAUNTED HIKE offers a family-friendly Haunted House and almost a mile-long decorated Fantasy Kiddie Trail with treat stations and costumed characters from a Cinderella Castle to a Gingerbread House and Little Miss Muffet and Jack and the Beanstalk.

DECEMBER- THE 15TH ANNUAL NATURE OF CHRISTMAS co-hosted this year by the City of Goshen and features free food, craft booths, a hayride, crafts, live music and a Santa and Mrs. Claus pass out treats to the first 200 children in line.

JULY-FAMILY FUN DAY-an afternoon of fun for the whole family that has run for the past six years.

Photos submitted by Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve



"Oldham Countians are loyal, kind, generous and passionate about both education and healthy activities for their families," Tavia admitted. "They are also incredibly generous when it comes to supporting the Nature Preserve." In fact, when an EF-1 tornado struck about a mile-long stretch of Goshen at midnight on April 27, 2017, the landscape at Creasey Mahan changed forever. An estimated 300 mature trees were down and the stately entrance once lined with Sugar Maple trees had toppled like dominoes. "Although the devastating images are imprinted in my memory, I will always cherish the day over 400 volunteers turned out in droves to help Creasey Mahan recover. It was inspiring and motivated me to continue with the work I do," Tavia concluded. Today, you'll see lots of new trees planted, but they still have much restoration ahead.

