

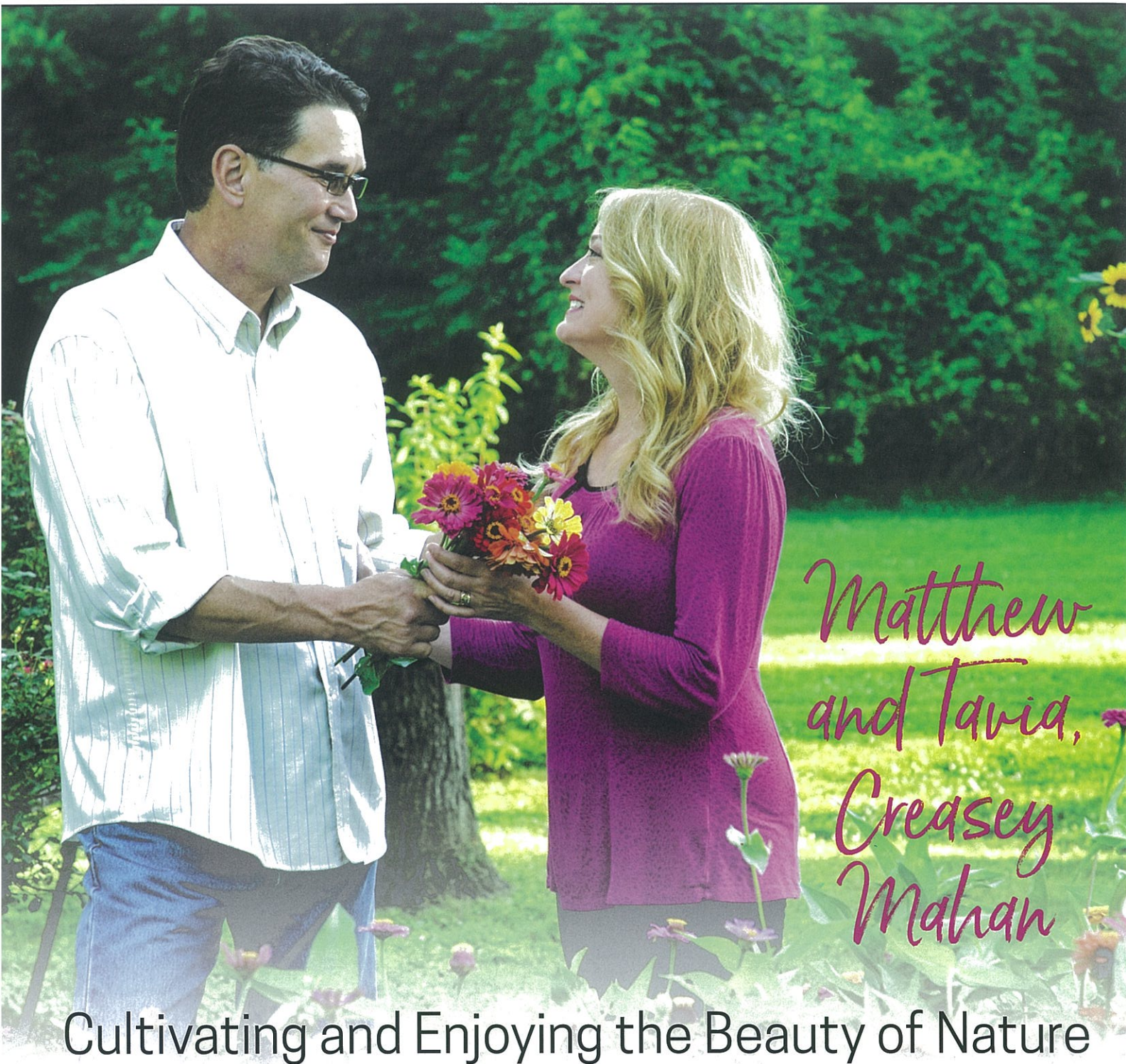
CRESTWOOD

Neighbors



Matthew and Tavia, Creasey Mahan

Cultivating and Enjoying the Beauty of Nature



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and Tavia,
Creasey
Mahan

Cultivating and Enjoying the Beauty of Nature

By Magaly DelValle, Submitted by Heather Mueller

Matthew Brown and Tavia Cathcart Brown were married amongst friends and family on June 2012 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. Tavia has helped design the Education Gardens for the new Waterfront Botanical Gardens phase one scheduled to open in Louisville in October.

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 have 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 happiest when I'm connected to nature and I love to share this joy with others."

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 50,000 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 features a giant 22' tall tower with three slides, 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, 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 Voegele, 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 Spring-house originally used to store milk, fruits and vegetables and a Field House 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 branch of the 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.

One can learn about the biological diversity and natural environments of Kentucky at Creasey Mahan's Nature Center and there is a special play area and activities for toddlers. A staff of five full-time 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 summer 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.

Also, Thrive Forest School is Louisville's first nature-based preschool, nestled in the beautiful woodlands of Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve. They have removed the walls and brought child-led, exploratory learning to where it makes the most impact: outside. Forest schools have been well established for over 50 years and are among the fastest-growing models in early-childhood education. Outside in all weather, rain or shine or snow, year-round! Development and learning are enhanced when children are given the space and confidence to follow their curiosities, engage with peers, stimulate all senses, and test their limits. This fosters a love of learning which will serve them well beyond primary school and

into their adult lives.

"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. 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.

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

For fun, Tavia and Matt 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 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 Ma-

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han's events, 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, but 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

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

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,

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