

The Watering Hole

The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter



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One step forward at a time

In this issue, we're highlighting a few of our many volunteers. From Girl Scouts to grant writers and everyone in between, the Willow Waterhole Greenway came to be because of individuals having a vision and taking action.

Each step may have seemed small at the time, but we wouldn't have the resources and green space today without each one. We're grateful for actions—big and small—that continue to bring the Waterhole to life.

Welcoming our newest Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy members

The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy is happy to welcome the following new annual members. Membership donations provide general operations funds that help maintain the park and programming, including free recreational events. When you join us, you become a partner in keeping Willow Waterhole a beautiful urban green space. To learn about the levels of membership, visit www.willowwaterhole.org/membership.

Individual Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Franklin AbbottBruce BiundoTroy Lynn BondsLowell BrownMarsha CarlbergAmber Farnham-MiddletonJanice FastowJacqueline V. HeidornFrank JonesWinston KileJoe LamonteMike LoughlinDeborah Taylor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dorothy Beeson-CaswellAnne BornetJane FalkVickie McLemoreDavid OsherowMark PicusRobert Robleto	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bruce Schroeder

*New members August - October 2020

Board member profile: Howard Sacks



Howard Sacks has been a Maplewood South/North resident for thirty-seven years. He served as the first president of Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy (2001-2011) and is currently the events chairman.

His passion is programming events at the Greenway, particularly live music. He has chaired the last seven Music Festivals and is chairman of Levitt Pavilion Houston, a planned state-of-the-art outdoor music pavilion, which will feature fifty **free** professional concerts annually.

Howard has a B.S. in film and television from Montana State University. He is retired after thirty-six years as a television advertising sales executive for KRIV-FOX26. Howard has been a Cub Scout leader, Little League coach, and served on the boards of Maplewood South/North and the Brays Bayou Association.



Meet the “Mother of Willow Waterhole:” Interview with Karen Cullar

Many often ask us how the Willow Waterhole Greenway came to be—and how it got funded. One of the best people to ask is Karen Cullar, a former grant writer and Houston area resident.

Recently, two board members spoke with Karen about how she discovered the funds needed to establish the Willow Waterhole Greenway. Given her initial involvement, she has affectionately earned the nickname “Mother of Willow Waterhole.”

Here is a bit of that story.

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In the 80’s and 90’s, Houston residents in Meyerland, Westbury, and surrounding areas were starting to think more seriously about flood control.

By 2000, local groups including the Brays Bayou Association had created plans for flood water detention ponds and a natural greenspace. Karen recalled that there was great interest in the project, but no funding at the time.

Karen, then the grant writer for the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD), learned of a new partnership opportunity with the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD). The district was looking for multi-use partners to create recreational features on top of their detention basins.

Art Storey, former director of the Harris County Flood Control District once remarked, “Detention basins don’t have to be ugly.” They can be actively used by communities.



This approach by the Harris Flood Control District created the partnership with the Houston Parks & Rec Department for what is now the Willow Waterhole Greenway.

Through the federal Water Resources Development Act, then-Congressman Ken Bentsen obtained authorization for Project Brays/Willow Waterhole with recreational use. The district and federal partnership created funding for Project Brays.

Meanwhile, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) developed a new funding opportunity for regional grants requiring at least two partners. In February 2000, TPWD invited the Houston Parks & Rec Department to submit a regional grant up to \$1 million due by April 1, 2000.

Meet the “Mother of Willow Waterhole:” Interview with Karen Cullar (cont.)

Within two months, Karen and a multijurisdictional team submitted a regional grant application to TPWD for \$1 million, using Harris County Flood Control District land acquisition funds to match the proposed park development features as 50/50 matching funds.

The Willow Waterhole partnership included the Houston Parks & Rec Department, Harris County Flood Control District, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Project Brays federal project. Some said it could not be done, especially in such a short timeframe.

The application also included 24 letters of support from the Brays Bayou Association and other community organizations, which Karen received within 24 hours of the request. She noted, “It was an amazingly, overwhelmingly quick response”—a testimony to the vision and support for Willow Waterhole Greenway.

Karen recalled that submitting the application didn’t go exactly as planned, working right up until the deadline. She added, “I try to never write a grant without partners.” With the copier malfunctioning and the mailing deadline passed, she and her colleague Merrie Talley (from the Harris Co. Flood Control District) hand delivered the grant to the department chief and then took him out to lunch.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received seven total grant applications, each valued at \$1 million—demonstrating a need for this type of funding throughout the state.

Ultimately, TPWD selected four projects, including the Brays/Willow Waterhole plan. The Houston Parks & Rec Department received a \$750,000 grant, which brought the Willow Waterhole Greenway to life.

Karen and many others worked with fellow conservation partners to create the greenspace. Partners included the Bayou Preservation Association, The Park People, Audubon Society, Trees for Houston, and the Westbury Area Improvement Corporation.

Karen has since moved to Coldspring, Tex., but continues to advocate for parks and recreation spaces, having worked more than 30 years in the field.

She shared that one of her mentors was Terry Hershey, a former member of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and a founding board member of Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association. Terry mentored women such as Karen through her “Women in Government” group, oriented towards supporting parks and nature.

A job well done for Karen and Terry for mothering and loving our green spaces.

