

Summit Metro Parks honors first naturalist

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By Staff Writer



Photo courtesy of Summit Metro Parks

SUMMIT COUNTY — Summit Metro Parks observed Bert Szabo Day Dec. 4 in honor of the park district's first interpretive naturalist. To help mark this annual occasion, Sand Run Parkway has been renamed "Bert Szabo Parkway" for December. Szabo is pictured above with a banner marking the occasion. The 34-year park district employee and volunteer celebrated his 100th birthday Dec. 4.

According to Metro Parks officials, after spending several years managing the dairy farm at Western Reserve Academy, Szabo, of Munroe Falls, began his career with what was then known as the Akron Metropolitan Park District in 1957. He worked in Sand Run Metro Park and served as the area manager for Goodyear Heights Metro Park before being appointed as the first chief naturalist in 1963.

Szabo helped initiate the Fall Hiking Spree, designed exhibits at the F.A. Seiberling Nature

Realm Visitors Center in West Akron, created the unique portal sign at Deep Lock Quarry Metro Park in Peninsula and was an early contributor to the Green Islands newsletter, now a magazine with a circulation of more than 14,000, according to Metro Parks officials. Following his retirement in 1991, Szabo became a volunteer for the park district, contributing more than 7,000 service hours to date, said Metro Parks officials. He was inducted into the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Hall of Fame, Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame and Summit Metro Parks Volunteer Hall of Fame. And earlier this year, he received the Special Award from the National Association of Interpretation (NAI). He also is a recipient of the National Audubon Society Great Egret Award, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Conservation Achievement Award, NAI President's Award and was twice named NAI's Outstanding Senior/Retired Interpreter. Szabo has served in leadership roles at NAI, the Association for Interpretive Naturalists, Greater Akron Audubon Society, Friends of Metro Parks and the Kirtlandia Society of Cleveland Natural History Museum and was appointed multiple times to the Governor's Natural Areas Council. He has a bachelor's degree in agriculture and a master's in botany from Ohio University and served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. "Bert is in a league of his own when it comes to his contributions to Summit Metro Parks, both as an employee and as a volunteer," said Executive Director Lisa King. "The park district wishes him a wonderful 100th birthday as we continue his legacy of dedication to the parks and nature education."