



Organizations Join Together for Mill Creek Freedom Trees Program
Freedom Center, Mill Creek Restoration Project and Paul Hemmer Companies/Sand Run Nursery & Preserve to Honor History of Mill Creek with Reforestation Project

CINCINNATI, OH, November 23, 2004 – The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Mill Creek Restoration Project and Paul Hemmer Companies in conjunction with Sand Run Nursery & Preserve announced the launch of the Mill Creek Freedom Trees Program today, at a tree planting event and press conference on the banks of Mill Creek in Northside. The program’s goal is to plant 10,000 native trees along the Mill Creek over the next 10 years to honor the history of the area through an urban reforestation effort. At today’s conference, Congressmen Rob Portman and Steve Chabot, and Vice Mayor Alicia Reese participated in the event, along with 40 local high school students who planted the first 150 Freedom Trees.

“This is an exciting and challenging urban river reforestation effort that will celebrate the rich cultural history of the Underground Railroad and its connections to Mill Creek,” said Freedom Center Executive Director Dr. Spencer Crew. “We are excited to partner with Mill Creek Restoration Project and Paul Hemmer’s Sand Run Nursery in this bold initiative.”

The Mill Creek corridor served as a major transportation route for thousands of slaves crossing the Ohio River at Cincinnati, and many of the courageous people who helped them lived in the Mill Creek watershed, the old urban core of Greater Cincinnati. These “freedom conductors” risked criminal prosecution to provide life-giving food, clothing, shelter and transportation assistance to the fugitive slaves. The Mill Creek Freedom Trees Program will incorporate educational signage highlighting this heritage.

“This event marks Mill Creek Restoration Project’s tenth anniversary, and we believe it’s a great way to celebrate it,” said Robin Corathers, executive director of the nonprofit organization. “Today we are making a commitment to plant 10,000 four-to-eight-foot tall native hardwood trees along the Mill Creek and its major tributary streams over the next 10 years. These trees will honor the courage and integrity of all the Underground Railroad heroes who fought so hard for freedom. This is an opportunity for people of all ages, but especially our youth, to take pride in creating a living legacy for future generations – a healthier and more vibrant creek with a greenway along its banks,” she said.

Mary and Paul Hemmer Jr. first conceived the idea for Freedom Trees about two years ago as a way to memorialize the millions of people who struggled for freedom. They have planted Freedom Trees in two locations in Northern Kentucky. “My wife and I are passionate about reforestation,” said Paul Hemmer Jr., President and CEO, Paul Hemmer Companies. “We have forged a partnership with the Mill Creek Restoration Project and the Freedom Center to help reforest and revitalize what is now a blighted urban corridor. It’s a great cause and we want to engage as many people as possible in this effort.”

Corathers said the Mill Creek Freedom Trees Program will be an important vehicle for raising public and private funds and for recruiting volunteers to help create and sustain the Mill Creek Greenway. “There

will be many opportunities for schools, individuals, families, foundations, local governments, businesses, and neighborhood, civic and environmental groups to participate in this innovative program,” she said.

Today, the first 150 Freedom Trees were planted by students from Dater and Loveland High Schools. Fifty of the first trees have been donated by Sand Run Nursery & Preserve and 100 have been purchased by the Mill Creek Restoration Project with funding from the City of Cincinnati’s Mill Creek Greenway Program.

Anyone can support the Mill Creek Freedom Trees Program by making a donation of \$75 per tree. A portion of the donation will support educational programs sponsored by the Mill Creek Restoration Project and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. For more information, and to make donations, contact the Mill Creek Restoration Project at 1617 Elmore Court, Cincinnati, Ohio 45223, or send an email to info@millcreekrestoration.org. The group’s telephone number is 513-731-8400 and its website address is www.millcreekrestoration.org.

For people who are interested in sponsoring Freedom Trees outside the boundaries of the Mill Creek watershed, visit the website www.freedomtrees.com or call the Paul Hemmer Companies at (866) 341-8300. The tree planting program is completely voluntary for public and private property owners.

Mill Creek Watershed

Mill Creek is about 28 miles long, starting in Liberty Township in Butler County and flowing through the heart of Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati to the Ohio River. The creek’s drainage basin covers approximately the central third of Hamilton County.

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Situated in Cincinnati, Ohio, on the banks of the Ohio River, the waters that once separated slave and free territory, the Freedom Center celebrates the legacy of courage and multicultural cooperation embodied in the story of the Underground Railroad. Of equal importance, the Freedom Center uses a wide array of exhibits to educate the public about the historic and continuing struggle to establish universal freedom in both the U.S. and around the world. For additional information, contact 513.333.7500 or visit www.freedomcenter.org.

Mill Creek Restoration Project

The Mill Creek Restoration Project’s mission is to serve as catalyst for developing sustainability in the Mill Creek watershed through community-based planning and empowerment, environmental education, and economically sound ecological restoration. The dynamic nonprofit organization sponsors the Mill Creek School Program for about 1,000 middle and senior high school students each year and the Mill Creek Greenway Program. For more information, visit www.millcreekrestoration.org.

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