



William D. Ginn

Conservationist, Civic Leader, and Steward of the Natural World

William D. “Bill” Ginn lived a life rooted in service, stewardship, and an abiding love of the natural world. A gifted attorney, civic leader, philanthropist, gardener, and conservationist, Bill brought extraordinary energy and vision to the causes he cared about—especially the protection of land, the care of communities, and the belief that future generations deserve access to beautiful, healthy natural places.

Born in Media, Pennsylvania, in 1923, Bill’s early life reflected the discipline, curiosity, and perseverance that would define him. He became an Eagle Scout, earned a full scholarship to Bates College, served in the U.S. Army during World War II, graduated Phi Beta Kappa, and went on to earn his law degree from Yale Law School, where he served as editor of the Yale Law Journal. His professional career as a corporate lawyer and litigator at Thompson Hine spanned 60 years, but his impact extended far beyond the courtroom.

Bill was a passionate advocate for the environment and a tireless supporter of civic and charitable organizations. Over his lifetime, he served on more than 100 nonprofit boards and committees, lending his legal skill, strategic mind, and generous spirit to organizations working in conservation, social services, education, health care, the arts, and community development.

In Geauga County, Bill’s conservation legacy is especially visible at The West Woods, now a treasured 902-acre Geauga Park District park.

Bill played a key role in helping the Park District acquire, fund, and create The West Woods, preserving significant forestland and natural habitat for public enjoyment and long-term protection. In recognition of his work, the entrance road was dedicated as William Ginn Parkway.

Bill also helped incorporate and found the Foundation for Geauga Parks, strengthening the community’s ability to support parks, conservation, outdoor education, and nature-based experiences. His leadership reflected a deep understanding that protected land does not happen by accident. It takes vision, persistence, partnerships, and people willing to step forward when a special place needs to be saved.

His commitment to conservation also extended through his service with organizations such as the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy of Ohio, The Davey Foundation, and The Davey Tree Board of Directors, where he served for nearly three decades and helped guide the company through its conversion to an employee-owned organization. These roles reflected Bill’s broad belief in responsible land stewardship, healthy communities, and long-term care for the natural resources that sustain us.

continued

Bill's love of nature was not only public and professional; it was deeply personal. He and his wife, Arlene, eventually made their home on a pastoral farm in Chesterland, where they grew apples, pears, and abundant crops. Known as an avid gardener and gentleman farmer, Bill found joy in the rhythms of the land. Dahlias were his specialty, and those who knew him saw in his gardening the same qualities that marked his public life: patience, discipline, curiosity, hard work, and care. One colleague described him as having "the hands of a farmer with a Yale mind"—a fitting tribute to a man who combined intellectual brilliance with a practical, hands-in-the-soil devotion to growth, cultivation, and service.

William D. Ginn's legacy lives on in the parks he helped protect, the organizations he strengthened, the communities he served, and the many people inspired by his example. His life reminds us that conservation is both an act of vision and an act of generosity: a decision to preserve what is precious, to serve something larger than oneself, and to leave the world richer, greener, and more hopeful than we found it.



Tribute to William D. Ginn

*by Keith Corkwell, President, Board of Trustees, Foundation for Geauga Parks
Presented post-humously to Bill's son David Ginn and his wife Cheryl*

"The Foundation for Geauga Parks is honored to recognize the enduring legacy of William D. Ginn, whose vision, commitment, and service helped shape the foundation of what this organization is today.

Bill Ginn was among those who incorporated and helped found the Foundation for Geauga Parks, giving early structure and purpose to an organization created to support and strengthen the parks, conservation, education, and natural spaces of Geauga County. His leadership helped establish the Foundation as a vehicle for generosity, stewardship, and lasting community impact. His service reflected a deep belief that protected land, outdoor education, and access to nature are essential gifts to be preserved for future generations.

Bill played an instrumental role in some of Geauga County's most treasured conservation achievements. He was closely connected to the preservation of The West Woods, helping advance the effort to protect hundreds of acres of forest and clean stream watershed that could have been lost to development. He also helped champion what became Observatory Park, playing a substantial role in raising millions of dollars to bring that vision to life."

continued

“His love of nature was deeply personal. Parks, wilderness, farms, gardens, birds, trees, streams, and open land were not abstract ideas to him. They were part of family life, community life, and a larger responsibility to future generations. Bill understood that protected natural spaces shape who we are, how we live, and what we leave behind.

But Bill’s legacy is not measured only in acres protected or dollars raised. It is found in the values he lived every day: hard work, discipline, compassion, curiosity, generosity, and an unwavering commitment to community. Those who knew him described a person who gives of himself not for recognition, but for the joy of doing good work. Whether working to preserve a rookery of great blue herons, supporting parks and protected lands, tending a garden, planting trees, or helping a community cause move forward, Bill consistently showed what stewardship looks like in action.

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of The Foundation for Geauga Parks, to announce the creation of the William D. Ginn Conservation Scholarship, an annual \$2,500 scholarship to be awarded to a graduating Geauga County high school senior pursuing studies in environmental science, conservation, natural resources, ecology, wildlife biology, sustainability, or a related field. This scholarship honors the extraordinary legacy of William D. Ginn, a conservation leader, civic volunteer, and passionate advocate for protecting the natural world. Bill’s life was defined by service, vision, and a deep belief that when an opportunity arises to protect something meaningful, we have a responsibility to act.

The William D. Ginn Conservation Scholarship is a fitting tribute to that legacy. By supporting a student who is preparing to pursue environmental studies, the Foundation seeks to honor Bill’s lifelong commitment to conservation while encouraging the next generation of leaders, advocates, scientists, educators, and land stewards. Each year, this scholarship will help a Geauga County student take the next step toward a future rooted in environmental responsibility and service. In doing so, it carries forward the same spirit that has defined Bill Ginn’s life: seeing what needs to be protected, stepping forward when it matters, and giving generously so that others may experience and care for the natural world.”