

Canada geese in the Maumee near the Toledo Farmers' Market.

Blazing Autumn

By ROD LOCKWOOD
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Nature's a big show-off this time of year, dazzling us with brilliant bright reds, awesome oranges, and spectacular yellows. Green becomes an accent color, the blue sky is an ideal background, and when the sun hits your favorite tree just so, it can take your breath away.

We hate to ruin this moment — and we know we could thoroughly destroy our reverie when we start thinking about picking up all these confounded leaves — but what we're really talking about as the engine for autumn's beauty is pretty simple.

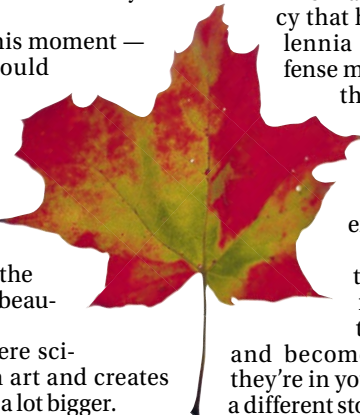
It's that point where science intersects with art and creates something that feels a lot bigger. To over-simplify: trees and bushes are shutting down in this part of the country, preparing for the short days and long nights of winter. The temperature's dropping, chlorophyll production is tapering off, and the green is fading out of the leaves as this process occurs on the plant's inexorable march toward winter's months-long slumber.

The oaks and maples and elms and all the others take on different hues based on the level of pigments like carotenoids and anthocyanins they have coursing through their systems. Sugar is trapped in the leaf as veins clog up, promoting the production of the pigments and leading to the process that causes leaves to flutter to the ground.

This machine-like consistency that has occurred for millennia is all part of the defense mechanisms of trees. If they didn't shut down, they'd be vulnerable to the subfreezing temperatures that are just a few calendar pages away. As for the leaves, well, the natural course is for them to pile up on the forest floor, rot, and become vegetation. When they're in your yard, of course, it's a different story.

But for now, let's not think about that. Better to look at them reflected in a pond looking like a 3-D impressionistic painting or to revel in their ostentatious burst of colors and appreciate the season for what it is: a thing of beauty.

Contact Rod Lockwood at: rockwood@theblade.com or 419-724-6159.



Leaf colors changing at Walbridge Park.



Walbridge Park shows off some of its autumnal splendor.

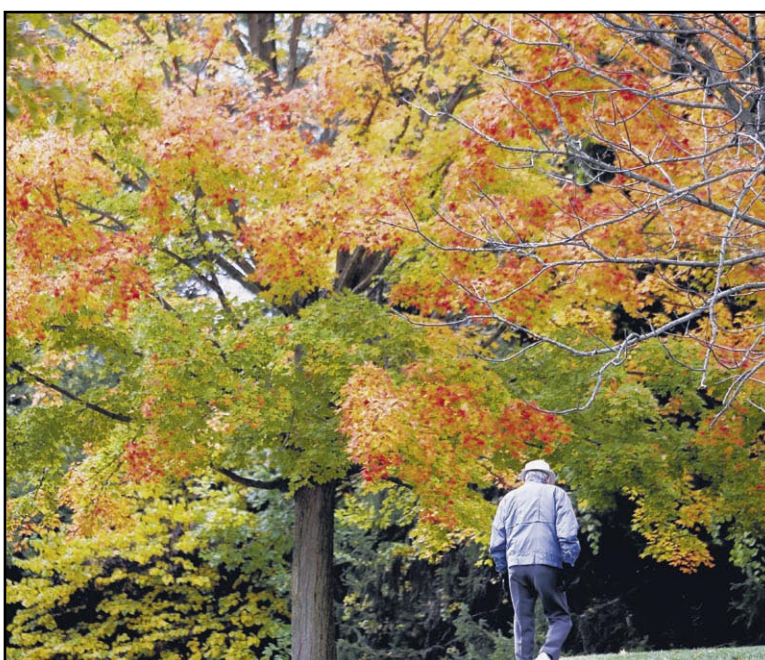
BLADE PHOTOS BY AMY E. VOIGT



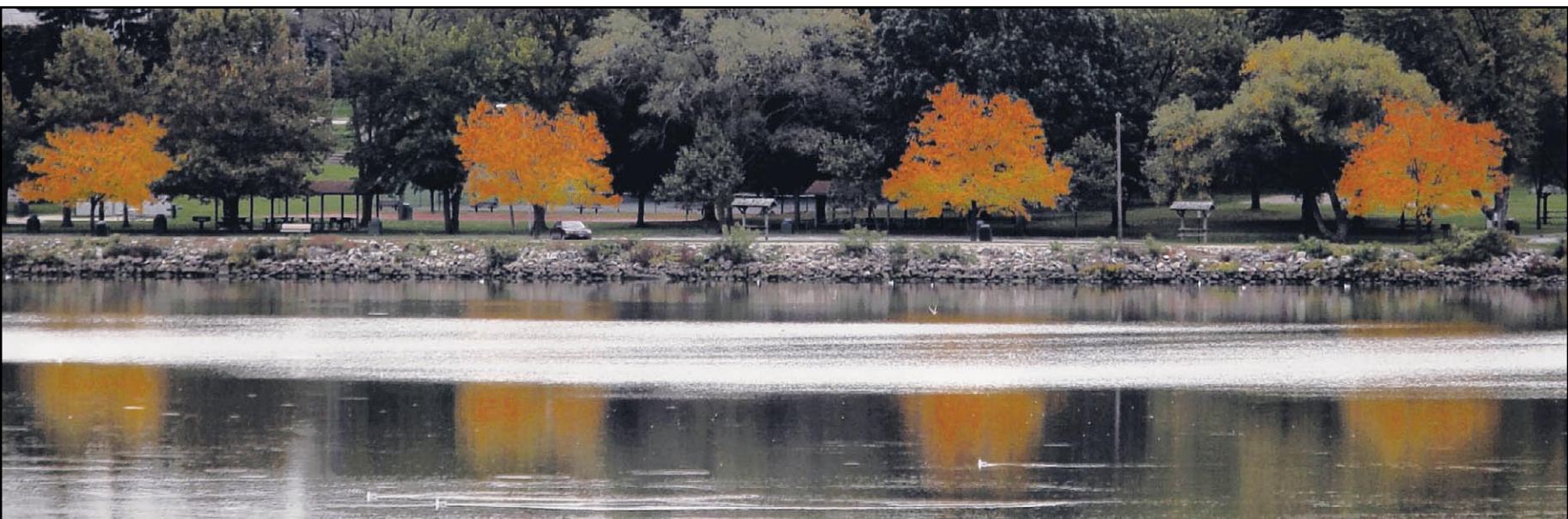
Deer graze below autumn foliage at Swan Creek Preserve Metropark.



Sunlight shines through crimson leaves in Waterville.



A man takes a walk in Swan Creek Preserve Metropark.



Colorful leaves are reflected in the Maumee River looking from Broadway Street in Toledo toward Perrysburg.