



Scaling new heights

Participants climb a tree during a program in Sidecut Metropark.

BLADE PHOTOS BY AMY E. VOIGT

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Go climb a tree ... Metroparks Toledo recently launched a program to encourage both the young and young-at-heart to get outside and enjoy nature, engaging in an activity as old as mankind. The park district's new tree-climbing program features ropes, harnesses, and instructors to help guide people up as high as 100 feet into treetops. It is far less risky than trying to ascend a tree using only its branches. Metroparks is even making special pulley-based equipment available for heavier and less-mobile people who want to get up in a tree for the exhilaration of a bird's-eye view. No nails, screws, bolts, or other hardware are used on the tree. Avid tree climber and Metroparks Toledo Manager of Outdoor Skills Ashley Smith describes the adrenaline rush like this: "I just think there's this sense of calmness and peacefulness that comes with climbing a tree. I like to just sit up there and meditate. It's a

great feeling, something you can't put into words." The program's inaugural climb, which was Nov. 26 at Sidecut Metropark, drew 17 climbers but a lot of attention from bystanders. Participants enjoyed a rare, panoramic view of the Maumee River from up high, especially with leaves having fallen off all trees. "We had a lot of people come by who were surprised to see [the climb]," Ms. Smith said. "Many said it was awesome and said they'll be doing it." Only five of those who participated in the first climb were youths. The minimum age to participate is 8 years old. There is no maximum. "Many of them climbed more than once," Ms. Smith said. In what may be yet another sign of climate change, Metroparks Toledo isn't shelving this activity the week between Christmas and New Year's, either. While people are trained to think of this time of year for skiing, snowmobiling, outdoor hockey, and figure skating, the park district has

scheduled its next tree climb 2 to 4 p.m. Dec. 27 at Toledo Botanical Garden — weather permitting, of course. To sign up, go to bit.ly/2ATVvly. Cost is \$25 for non-members and \$20 for members. Wear layered clothing and sturdy shoes. "We're going to do it throughout the winter," Ms. Smith said. If possible, Metroparks Toledo will do tree climbs once a month from now on. It has identified a single tree at six locations for climbing activities — one at Sidecut, the Toledo Botanical Garden, and its Secor, Oak Openings, Wildwood, and Swan Creek metroparks. A leather sheath is used to preserve each tree's juicy cambium (a thin layer of cell growth beneath the bark), the lifeblood of each tree. "It's another way to get people into parks and outside," Ms. Smith said. "This is really a unique opportunity for the area."

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Jake Willing, right, outdoor skills specialist with Metroparks Toledo, helps Erik Bradley, left, 11, descend from the tree.



Jamie Luster of Maumee takes a selfie after climbing to the top of the tree and ringing the bell during the program in Sidecut Metropark.



Kellen Luster, left, Spencer Luster, center, and Gloria Liedigk watch as their loved ones climb.



Kaleb Pieper, 12, of Walbridge, climbs a tree.



Jake Willing, right, outdoor skills specialist with Metroparks Toledo, helps Spencer Luster, left, of Maumee, put on his helmet.



Alissa Barwinski, right, of the programming department at Metroparks Toledo, helps Jamie Luster of Maumee get into the ropes during a tree climbing program in Sidecut Metropark.



Ms. Barwinski class participants how to properly use the ropes.