

**Kathrine G. McGovern**  
**President and Chair of the John P. McGovern Foundation**  
**(1993-2023)**



Mrs. Kathrine McGovern was always thoughtful and intentional in her unwavering support of Houston Audubon (HAS). She helped make HAS a stronger, more impactful organization and helped improve the greater Houston landscape for the betterment of birds and people's enjoyment. From the iconic McGovern Canopy Walkway overlooking the Smith Oaks rookeries in High Island to supporting those committed to improving urban green space through Houston Audubon's Urban Conservation Award which was named in her honor, Mrs. McGovern's mark of generosity, care for community, and love for the place she called home will be felt, seen, and experienced for years to come.

Kathrine McGovern has been generously donating to the Houston Audubon Society (HAS) since 2001. She has been Houston Audubon's largest supporter for many years. Her love for birds started while hiking and birdwatching in the Living Desert while living in California. Her honeymoon in Key West, Florida led to a lifelong passion for fishing and birding. Kathy is a true bird lover. She owned her first parakeet/Budgerigar (Budgie) named Mac while in college. She continued to enjoy pet Budgies while living in her high rise, both named Mac.

During Kathrine's tenure as the John P. McGovern president and board chair, many large gifts were made to Houston Audubon including the \$2.362M infrastructure improvements to the Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in High Island, Texas—the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway, Visitor Pavilion and Public Restrooms.

Kathy's generosity was spread throughout Houston with many transformative gifts. Included in her December 2023 obituary:

During Kathrine's tenure as foundation president, large gifts established The John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Centennial Gardens and the Kathrine G. McGovern Flyway in Hermann Park. In 2015, the

Foundation made a transformational \$75 million gift to UTHealth Houston to bolster medical training, provide full scholarships, and support scientific discovery and innovation. In honor of the gift, UTHealth Houston renamed its medical school the John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Medical School. A long-time patron of the Houston Zoo, Kathrine made a record \$50 million gift through the foundation in 2018 to support the zoo's facilities and programs. In 2019, a \$20 million gift from the foundation established the Kathrine G. McGovern College of Arts at the University of Houston. Three years later, Kathrine, a former student of art and design at the University of Houston, received an honorary doctorate from the university for her lifetime dedication to the arts and education.

Mrs. Kathrine McGovern's thoughtful gifts will benefit people and nature for years to come.

### **Gift Summary**

- Kathrine McGovern became a Houston Audubon Society Lifetime Member in 2004
- The McGovern Foundation has been the lead underwriter at the HAS Galas since 2003 and provided substantial matching gifts at the Fund-a-Needs.
- Kathrine McGovern has made large significant gifts to HAS Education Programming, General Operations and Year-End gifts since 2001
- The McGovern Foundation made a \$2.362 transformational gift to HAS in 2017 funding the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway, Public Restrooms, and a Visitor Pavilion at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary

### **Interesting Information**

- Kathy McGovern was a native Houstonian. She attended River Oaks Elementary, Lanier Jr. High, and Lamar High School. She grew up in a neighborhood near Montrose.
- John P. McGovern, M.D. married Houstonian Kathrine Dunbar Galbreath on December 20, 1961. Earlier that same year he started his own foundation, originally called the Texas Allergy Research Foundation, with \$10,000 of his savings. Through investments in the stock market, real estate, and his own successful medical practice, he grew the foundation, which was renamed the John P. McGovern Foundation in 1979, from that initial investment into a fund approaching \$200 million at the time of his death.
- The board members of the John P. McGovern Foundation include Julia Mitchell, long-time adviser and facilitator, and Sheila Lewis and William C. Shrader.
- The McGovern name can be found on medical scholarships, professorships, and medical buildings throughout the country, as well as, Houston landmarks such as the John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Centennial Gardens/McGovern Lake/Kathrine G. McGovern Flyway in Hermann Park; John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Medical School; Kathrine G. McGovern College of Arts at the University of Houston; McGovern-Stella Link Regional Library; McGovern Museum of Health and Medical Science; John P. McGovern Children's Zoo; McGovern Park on Braes Blvd; and the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway.

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APRIL 6, 2019  
Destination High Island Unveiling Ceremony



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APRIL 8, 2019

## High Island Nature Tourism Enhancement Project Press Release

By Beth Boone



### **Houston Audubon and John P. McGovern Foundation Announce \$2.3 Million Nature Tourism Enhancement Project in High Island, TX**

Project features the new Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway – an elevated viewing experience through the woodlot at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary

4/8/2019 – High Island, TX – Houston Audubon and Kathrine G. McGovern unveiled the \$2.3 million nature tourism enhancement plan for Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in High Island on Saturday, April 6, 2019. The project will feature the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway—an elevated viewing experience through the forest canopy and sub-canopy. The plans also include renovating a 1920’s brick building known as the pump house, and new restrooms. The renovated pump house will be used as a visitor center and gathering space. The project is expected to be completed in time for Spring Migration, 2020.

“We are delighted to be able to sponsor the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway at this beautiful sanctuary,” said Kathrine McGovern. “It is for the birds and the people who enjoy them.”

The architecture of the canopy walkway is designed to complement the natural backdrop and setting of the sanctuary. A handicap-accessible entrance ramp will lead to 700 feet of boardwalk through premium birding areas, and will reach up to 18 feet above ground. The immersive experience will include an overlook at Smith Pond and at the Clay Bottom Pond Rookery which is already a crowd pleaser for both intense birders, wildlife photographers and for casual tourists, who are thrilled to see the pink birds and alligators.

“The Kathrine G. McGovern canopy walkway will be a first for Houston Audubon and for the region. High Island is one of the most popular birding destinations in the US during spring and thanks to the

generous support of the John P. McGovern Foundation, visitors will experience nature and a dazzling parade of birds on the elevated canopy walkway,” said Helen Drummond, Executive Director of Houston Audubon. “We believe this unique experience will attract even more birders, photographers, and nature enthusiasts to the Upper Texas Coast.”

Not only do birds contribute necessary ecological services, they also provide an economic boost. According to a 2016 US Fish and Wildlife Service report, \$75 billion was spent on wildlife watching, and birdwatching was the biggest contributor with more than 66 million people participating.

Project design team includes SWA Group, SCHAUM/SHIEH Architects, CSF Consulting, LP, and Hunt & Hunt Engineering Corp.

Established in 1969 as an autonomous, self-supporting chapter of the National Audubon Society, Houston Audubon’s mission is to advance the conservation of birds and positively impact their supporting environments, which it accomplishes through acquiring and maintaining critical habitat as bird sanctuaries, providing education programs and nature experiences for children and adults, and advocating policy and management actions in support of the mission. Houston Audubon owns and manages 17 nature sanctuaries encompassing 3,400 acres across the Greater Houston and Galveston regions and became an Accredited Land Trust in 2017.

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MARCH 8, 2021

## Houston Audubon Holds Ribbon Cutting Ceremony to Officially Open the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway

By Zineera Seth



*Sam Smith, Kathrine McGovern, Helen Drummond, Richard Gibbons*

3/8/2021- High Island, TX- Houston Audubon along with Mrs. Kathrine McGovern officially opened the highly anticipated canopy walkway at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in High Island with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Thursday, March 04, 2021. The Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway, an elevated viewing experience through the forest canopy and sub-canopy, is designed to complement the natural backdrop and setting of the sanctuary and is now open to the public.

The 700 feet of boardwalk with a handicap-accessible entrance ramp meanders through the sanctuary through premium birding areas, and reaches up to 17 feet into the treetops. The immersive experience includes an overlook at Smith Pond and at the Clay Bottom Pond Rookery which is already a crowd pleaser for both intense birders, wildlife photographers and for casual tourists, who are thrilled to see an up-close view of migratory and resident birds resting and nesting.

“With this project, Houston Audubon wanted to create a memorable immersive experience that makes the incredible world of birds more accessible to all,” said Helen Drummond, Executive Director of Houston Audubon. “Because of Mrs. McGovern’s generous support and a dedicated group of design professionals committed to the vision, visitors can now learn more about the incredible journeys of migratory birds and the dramatic display of hundreds of nesting egrets, herons, spoonbills, and cormorants from an exciting and unique vantage point.”

The opening of the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway coincides with the beginning of spring bird migration when migratory birds from South and Central America fly nonstop for more than 600 miles and stop at our coastal sanctuaries to rest and refuel.

“We are delighted to be able to sponsor the Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway at this beautiful sanctuary,” said Kathrine McGovern. “It is for the birds and the people who enjoy them.”

Houston Audubon is grateful to Mrs. McGovern and The John P. McGovern Foundation for the generous funding of the canopy walkway and to the Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation for the generous funding for the interpretive walkway panels. The canopy walkway was designed by SWA Group.

Visitors are welcome at Houston Audubon’s High Island sanctuaries every day of the week from dawn to dusk. Admission fee is \$8 per person and can be paid at the welcome kiosk open from March 26-May 2. To plan your next trip to Houston Audubon’s High Island sanctuaries, visit <https://houstonaudubon.org/sanctuaries/high-island/>

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[Video of Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway](#)

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JANUARY 21, 2021

## Special Recognition for Houston Audubon's Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway

By Zineera Seth



We're pleased to announce that Houston Audubon's Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary was selected for a special recognition in the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) annual Parks and Natural Areas Award Program. H-GAC established this awards program in 2006 to highlight best practices and innovative approaches to parks planning and implementation. Organizations will be recognized this year during an online celebration on Feb 5. The public is welcome to join.

The Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway is a unique, immersive nature experience that elevates visitors 17 feet into the treetops to be at eye level with the birds that take refuge at High Island. This 700-foot-long ADA accessible walkway designed by SWA Group provides a unique vantage point, amazing views of the world-renowned rookery, and a retreat from the pesky mosquitos down below. Make sure to check out the Canopy Walkway this spring!

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