

Did You Know?

Did you know . . . how the Lionel Hampton Trail, the Lionel Hampton Park and the Lionel Hampton - Beecher Hills Park were created?

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Photo Credit: Dr. James Densler

Crossing through parts of Audubon Forest, the paved 1.16-mile Lionel Hampton Trail begins on Willis Mill Road at Jenny Wren Street, runs through a forested area emerging at Willis Mill Road then continues after Flamingo Drive through more forests before ending with a playground, multiple fitness stations and a parking area at 366 Willis Mill Road. The trail also connects to the 1.2-mile Southwest Beltline Connector near Beecher Hills Elementary School. Surrounding the trail are the Lionel Hampton Park and the Lionel Hampton-Beecher Hills Park that jointly form a 100+ acre nature preserve encompassing mature forest, the Utoy Creek and historical Civil War markers.

Who was Lionel Hampton and why is his name on the trail and the parks? Born in Louisville KY in 1908 and raised in Birmingham AL and Chicago, IL where he began his musical career playing drums for the Chicago Defender Newsboy's Band, Hampton moved to Los Angeles, CA in the late 1920's and eventually formed the iconic Lionel Hampton Orchestra which became the longest established orchestra in jazz history. His notable accomplishments as a jazz vibraphonist, percussionist, bandleader and songwriter led to many awards of merit including the National Merit of Arts, the Kennedy Center Honors, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

A steadfast Republican until the early 1990s, Hampton and his business manager wife, Gladys, formed their own music publishing company and two record labels. They also began investing in real estate. By the 1960s, they owned 22 houses in Los Angeles, and property in Las Vegas and in Texas where they struck oil. They moved to New York City and continued to buy property across the United States and in Europe. As part of a Republican agenda to use private enterprise to help address housing problems in inner cities, Gladys worked with New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller to form the Lionel Hampton Development Corporation. Through that entity in the 1970s, they built Lionel Hampton Homes and Gladys Hampton Houses, totaling 565 units of low-and-moderate income apartments in Harlem. Later in the 1980s, they built Hampton Hills, a project with 200 condominiums in Newark, NJ. In a 1986 Los Angeles Times interview, Hampton said he had acquired 123 acres of land in Atlanta with the intention to build 355 homes and was travelling back and forth to Atlanta in connection with his project.



Lionel and Gladys Hampton in 1950. Photo Credit: University of Idaho