Fred Smith, Director, Stringfellow Health Fund Grants says, “I am thrilled with the response from the community.” Fred traveled throughout CFNEA’s nine-county region to meet with groups and individuals to introduce the concept of OSSP for their community. The results have been excellent. All Open Spaces Sacred Places™ will be completed by November 15, 2019, with the first ribbon cutting held February 2, 2020.

Open Spaces Sacred Places™ (OSSP) are green spaces intended for the encouragement of community well-being and resilience of mind/body/spirit of both individuals and communities. These special places have been conceived by an individual or organization inspired with the idea that access to nature can make a positive impact on the various challenges individuals and communities face. Behind each space is one or more “Firesouls”, individuals with a burning passion to design and develop an Open Spaces Sacred Places™. Each organization received a $10,000 grant from the Stringfellow Health Fund to build their OSSP.

The TKF Foundation originally conceived and created the first OSSP. The Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama chose the OSSP model to celebrate the generous legacy left to northeast Alabama by Susie Parker Stringfellow almost 100 years ago. What began as one woman’s legacy has impacted millions of individuals through the provision of quality healthcare services, community wellness, and support to not-for-profit organizations which have received just over $8.5 million in grant awards since 1999.

West Anniston Gateway, Calhoun County

The West Fifteenth Street Historic District was once a thriving commercial and social center for African-Americans during an era of deep segregation. The Open Spaces Sacred Places™ pocket park in this historic area will offer a means for reflection; a place for people to feel an understanding of the impact of this place and history. Firesouls are Pete Conroy and Steven Folks.
Cherokee County Civitan & Cedar Grove Baptist Church - Weiss Lake Overview, Cherokee County

Designed for use by its community, this Open Spaces Sacred Places™ will support fellowship and neighborhood gatherings and work to promote a sense of agency and pride in the area. Firesouls are the Reverend Gregory Higgins and Bob Pickerel.

Talladega College Sacred Places: Honoring Our Ancestors, Enacting our Dreams, Talladega County

Talladega College is Alabama’s oldest private historically black college. The campus sits in the historic part of Talladega. The college has integrated an Open Spaces Sacred Places™ adjacent to its chapel—one of the campus hallmarks and home to most of the campus engagement. Firesouls are Miliani Sinclair, Sedrick Hill and Mary Sood.

Gadsden Cultural Arts Foundation: Reflective Garden at the historic Gunn-Bellenger House, Etowah County

Set on the grounds of the historic Gunn-Bellenger House, all senses will be engaged through colorful native plantings, musical chimes, seasonal variations and more. The open gazebo just begs for creative practice like plein air art or writing. Firesouls are Bobby Welch & Jennifer Finlayson.
Community Restorative Garden and Dog Run, Cleburne County

Heflin is a community of dog-lovers. The Open Spaces Sacred Places™ will offer a dog run aimed to inspire more use and engagement for all community members, even the furry ones. Firesouls are Tammy Perry and Kamaren Holland.

Mc Cord’s Crossroads Homemakers Club: Crossroads Garden: A Place of Solace and Remembrance, Cherokee County

The McCord’s Crossroads Homemakers Club provides positive support for local families through leadership and education with an emphasis on place and history. In keeping with their mission, this Open Spaces Sacred Places™ will be a place where people may journey back and remember the history of their families that built the community. Firesouls are Barry Kerr, Edna Jennings and Sheila Mobley.
Named for one of the longest-serving members of the Supreme Court and a native of Clay County, the Open Spaces Sacred Places™ is intended to offer a place of quiet reflection while also recognizing and honoring those who struggled and fought for their basic civil and human rights. Firesoul is The Honorable John Rochester.

Fort Payne Main Street: Reflection and Meditation Garden, DeKalb County

Tucked in a valley near Lookout Mountain, A “Life Garden”—will be integrated within a community walking park and offers a reminder to visitors to spend a few moments reflecting, appreciating and renewing oneself in nature. Firesouls are Tim Harris and Connie Fuller.
Servants in Faith & Technology (SIFAT) – Sarah’s Garden, Randolph County

SIFAT is a not-for-profit organization located in Randolph County, AL, that trains community leaders in helping distressed populations thrive—both in the US and across the globe. SIFAT looks to integrate Sarah’s Garden, in an effort to help its local community improve the physical and mental health of its citizens and to “cultivate a relationship between SIFAT and our neighbors”. Firesouls are Angie Stryker & Mellie Parrish.

Stringfellow Garden, Clay County

Infusing pride, a sense of agency and civic engagement are the driving forces behind the creation of an Open Spaces Sacred Places™ in the City of Ashland. In memory of Susie Parker Stringfellow, this “park within a park” will serve as a place of acceptance and peace. Firesouls are Kim Cain and Ellen Sewell.
Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement, Inc.: SAFE’s Mind, Body and Spirit Pathway, Talladega County

The “Mind, Body and Spirit Pathway” will impact the entire Sylacauga and Talladega County areas. Located within the Sylacauga Housing Authority, residents may enjoy easy access to SAFE’s Mind, Body and Spirit Pathway. Others will arrive at the Pathway by walking, biking, public or personal vehicle transportation. The Sylacauga GROWS Community Garden provides healing and restoration dealing with food impact for families who would otherwise be hungry. Firesouls are Margaret Morton and Debbie Adair.

Pell City Gateway Community Garden, Inc.: Healing and Restorative Garden, St. Clair County

A Healing and Restorative Garden will bring people together to enjoy nature. The organization hopes to enrich its culture and economy—working to prevent crime in effective ways. Firesouls are Worth Barnham and Linda Tutwiler.
Gadsden Public Library: Sensory Garden, Etowah County

Aligned with the mission of the library, the Gadsden Public Library’s Open Spaces Sacred Places™ Sensory Garden is centered around inclusion. The space aims to facilitate learning, encourage teens and youth to be self-directed and motivated, and to provide members of the community a place to find solace, support, and relaxation. An herb garden will offer therapeutic learning—a way for students with special needs (who just happen to work at Beautiful Rainbow Café) to further develop their vocational, educational, social, and therapeutic skills into their daily routines. Firesouls are Ashley Handy and Nicole Papa-Tudor.

Mentone Arts & Cultural Center: Dr. Stephen Brewer Sculpture Garden, DeKalb County

Mentone is a pocket of rich history and culture for Alabama. To pay homage to its deep heritage, a sculpture garden will celebrate the Cherokee culture and will serve as a creative community hub for artists and the public alike. Firesoul is Randy Grider.
A beautiful pathway looks to infuse more holistic therapies to foster the healing of their 100+ “sojourners” — residents of their assisted living and specialty care facilities. Firesouls are Sandra Keener and Dr. Ben Ingram.

**Open Spaces Sacred Places™ Annapolis, Maryland**

Fred Smith, Director, Stringfellow Health Fund Grants, traveled to Annapolis, Maryland as a speaker and guest of the TKF Foundation’s Celebration of the Firesouls Network. During the program Fred shared updates and highlights about the Open Spaces Sacred Places™ (OSSP) sites in northeast Alabama. He also had the opportunity to visit several OSSP sites.

“Meeting Tom and Kitty Stoner, co-founders of the TKF Foundation, and other Firesouls from the Maryland area was the highlight of the trip,” said Fred Smith.

The Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama is looking forward to the continued development of all of the wonderful sites being created throughout northeast Alabama.