



Green Places

Summer 2004 • Kent County Parks Department

Millennium Park Season Opens

After a long Michigan winter and a chilly Michigan spring, the sun-drenched sand at Millennium Park's beach is warming the toes of 2004 visitors.



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Secchia Champions Millennium Park

Thanks to Peter Secchia's dedicated efforts on behalf of this celebrated urban park project, the Kent County Parks Foundation has raised millions of dollars for land acquisition, restoration and improvement.

"Despite all the hard work, this has been a tremendously satisfying project," said Secchia, former ambassador. "I am proud to be a part of something that will outlive and outlast all of us."

Fund raising for all Kent County Parks, as well as future land acquisition, continues. The Kent County Parks Foundation can accept gifts of cash, appreciated securities, or real estate. Legacy gifts, planned gifts and bequests are also welcomed. Naming opportunities are available for gifts of \$500,000 or more. All contributors will be recognized in future issues of Green Places.

For more information about the Kent County Parks Foundation, please call Sue Waddell at (616) 742-6194.

The all-new Splash Pad—a state-of-the-art spray play place—is ready to tickle those same toes with splashes, spurts and sprays of water.

Funded primarily by a generous private donation, the Splash Pad features an assortment of fountains, sprinklers and hoses designed to delight and drench those who venture in.

"We think the Splash Pad is going to be a big hit this summer," said Roger Sabine, Kent County Parks director. "It will provide great water fun for the young and the young-at-heart." Parents and grandparents can join in the fun, or watch from the relatively dry lounge chairs around the perimeter.

While the park had no shortage of visitors after it opened in August 2003, Sabine said it wouldn't surprise him if attendance tops 10,000 on busy weekend days this year. That's why more than 300 new parking spaces were added this spring, bringing the total to over 900.

"It's brand new, and it's already one of the most popular places in the Kent County Parks system," said

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— Roger Sabine
Director, Kent County Parks Department

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The concession stand will again serve a variety of food and drink, from hot dogs and burgers to more adult fare. Work will be underway this year to build a boating center and launch, which by 2005 will offer rental kayaks, canoes and row boats.

Beginning this season, Millennium Park will be staffed full-time by a Kent County sheriff deputy. Free to Kent County residents, the park will be open seven days a week, 8 a.m. to dusk, with the beach opening each morning at 10 a.m. Sabine explained that the park crew has to use the early-morning hours to clean and sweep the beach, so barefoot visitors are always greeted by that warm, sparkling sand.

Did you know?

At 1,500 acres, Millennium Park is one of the largest urban parks in the world.



From floodplain forests to open fields, from shimmering lakes to woodland waterways, Kent County Parks are protecting and preserving an abundance of Michigan's precious natural resources.

"Kent County is losing hundreds of acres of pristine undeveloped land each year. If we don't act soon, the last of Kent County's rolling meadows, storybook forests and dappled fields will be forever lost to subdivisions, strip malls and urban sprawl. And when it's gone, it's gone."

— Roger Sabine

Director, Kent County Parks

Please use the attached envelope to help us preserve precious natural resources in Kent County today.

**Send your tax-deductible contributions to:
Kent County Parks Foundation
1700 Butterworth Drive
Grand Rapids, MI 49544**



For a copy of the
Kent County Parks
Foundation Brochure
call (616) 336-PARK.

The New Wahlfield Park—Preserving a Kent County Treasure for Future Generations

On a blue-sky summer day, the rolling terrain of Centennial Farm could take your breath away.

Complete with a babbling brook, stately trees, and gently undulating hills, the 200-acre farm is a picture-perfect example of Michigan's rural beauty. Its lush fields and rich habitats have supported life in Kent County for generations.

In 2002, this Kent County treasure became a jewel in the Kent County Parks system. Now a part of Wahlfield Park, the acquisition of Centennial Farm was made possible by Kent County taxpayers, the Comstock Park Rotary and Alpine Township.

"Thanks to the county's land acquisition program, we were able to preserve this amazing tract of land for future generations," said Daryl Delabbio, county administrator. "It's incredibly gratifying to know that 50 years from now, 100 years from now, Kent County residents may still be fishing from the bridge over Mill Creek."

County Commissioner Fritz Wahlfield and his wife Marlene donated the original 50 acres of Wahlfield Park to the County 20 years ago. Located in Alpine Township on the northwest corner of M37

and 8 Mile Road, the expanded park will see major construction this summer. Comstock Park Rotary members, longtime "great supporters of the Park system," raised \$100,000 to construct one of the largest playgrounds in Kent County. Two open shelters, grills, picnic tables and restrooms will complete the picture, with all facilities scheduled to be open in 2005. Kent County purchased the land at appraised value for \$1.2 million.



Acquisition Program Preserves Green Space

Thanks to the foresight of generous people over the last 80 years, Kent County has a strong system of free, public parks.

With the foresight of generous people today, Kent County can continue its tradition of preserving green space for future generations.

"The land our forefathers preserved makes up the core of the county park system we have today," said Roger Sabine, Kent County Parks director. "We want to do the same for our children and their children."

By the number of parks, Kent County Parks is the largest system in the state. But by the number of acres, Kent County hovers around average. When state park land is factored in, Kent County's standing drops further. Oakland County, for example, has more than 28,000 acres of state recreational park land. Kent County has a mere 5,400 acres of state land.

"We just don't have the state resources," Sabine said. "And with our steady population growth, the green space we have today will not be sufficient for the future."

A Kent County land acquisition program, begun in 1998 by former Kent County Board Chair Steven Heacock, has helped. With the \$4 million in seed money from the General Fund, Kent County Parks grew by four parks and 1,300 acres in just five years. But while the money in the land acquisition fund is

an excellent resource, it doesn't go far enough.

"Most landowners like the ability to leave a legacy of green," Sabine said. "We pay appraised value, and they are pleased to see the land they've nurtured over the years stay intact."

Some generous landowners will even hold their land in the hope that the County will come up with the resources to pay them.

"I could write \$10 million in purchase agreements today if I had the money," Sabine said.

Always with an eye to the future, Sabine said he's hoping to someday acquire land for a regional park in the Lowell area, a region rich with native plants, animals, even eagles.





Kent Trails Foster Community Spirit

From John Ball to Johnson to Millennium Park—and south to Byron Center—Kent Trails partners are connecting walkers, runners, skiers, skaters, strollers and cyclists in Kent County.

You can start in cow country and end up at an ice cream stand,” said one cyclist. “And if you venture onto a connecting trail, you could end up in Cadillac or Hastings.”

Part of an extensive network of trails in Kent County, Kent Trails was formed by a collaborative agreement among six units of government 20 years ago. Led by Kent County, and managed by Kent County Parks, the collaborative partners are Byron Township, City of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Walker and Wyoming.

“The trails foster a unique spirit of community,” said Roger Sabine, Kent County Parks

director. “There’s a great mix of people, from babies in strollers to seniors in walking shoes, waving to and greeting each other out on the trail.”

To find Kent Trails, follow the distinctive teal signs in John Ball, Johnson, Millennium or Douglas Walker Parks.

For a trail map, go to www.accesskent.com.

Elsewhere in the trail network this summer, crews will be at work on the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail, laying down

pavement from the City of Kentwood south to the Kent/Barry county line.

Other trails in the Kent County hub include Southbelt, White Pine, Musketawa, and North Country Scenic trails.



Camping at Wabasis Lake Park

Seven miles east of Rockford, Wabasis Lake is teeming with blue gill and bass.



At the campground, a newly enlarged boating channel is making it easier to dock fishing boats, and the fish are biting. As the largest lake in Kent County, Wabasis Lake is the perfect place to cast a line after a hard day’s work in the city.

Wabasis Lake Park and Campground are close enough to Grand Rapids to commute in to work. It’s not a bad drive, and there are still a lot of daylight hours after the clock strikes five.

Wabasis Lake Campground is located at Wabasis Avenue and 11 Mile Road in Oakfield Township. The campground’s 15 full hookup and 45 electric sites are generously sized. There are also 16 primitive sites and 15 walk-in primitive sites available. Large grassy sites, including some lakefront sites, are popular with visitors. One cottage, which sleeps

seven and comes with a row boat, is available for weekly rental as well.

With over 200 feet of sandy beach frontage on Wabasis Lake, swimming is a popular activity.

In addition to fishing, swimming, and hiking the trails, you can visit the game room, playgrounds and camp store. A nature program for kids features a new theme each weekend. New volleyball and basketball courts have been added to complement the baseball diamond, bathhouse and restroom facilities.

The park’s enclosed shelter, overlooking the lake (pictured below), provides a scenic location for birthdays, weddings, receptions, anniversaries and reunions.

Wabasis Lake Park and campground is located at 9220 Wabasis Avenue. For park reservations, call (616) 336-PARK. **For camping reservations call (616) 691-8056.**

The Natural Choice for your next gathering

Picnics, reunions, open houses, company outings... they are all more fun in the great outdoors. Reserve a spot for your event today. Call (616) 336-PARK or go to www.accesskent.com.

Note: You can now reserve facilities in Kent County Parks up to 12 months in advance. Start planning your 2005 events today! (Campground sites excluded.)



Wabasis Lake Park Shelterhouse

5,000 Ash Trees Fall at Palmer Park

An emerald ash borer infestation at the L.E. Kaufman Golf Course in Palmer Park is responsible for the cutting of 5,000 ash trees this spring.

From young saplings to decades-old trees, roughly one-third of the trees in the park had to be destroyed in an attempt to prevent the spread of the deadly infestation.

"This is a greenish insect, smaller than a penny, that is death to ash trees," said Gary Huizenga, manager of parks operations. "It chews its way under the tree's bark, crippling the tree in the process. Then it lays its eggs and moves on to destroy another tree."

The emerald ash borer has killed millions of ash trees in southeast Michigan, and was detected in West Michigan in March 2004. Officials with the Michigan Department of Agriculture are mandating a cut-and-destroy strategy to prevent similar destruction on this side of the state.

"The idea is to stop the outbreak by destroying the host," said Huizenga. "It's kind of like burning a band of trees to keep a fire from destroying the entire forest."



Officials know that emerald ash borers can only travel about one-half a mile in their three-week lifetimes, so that determines the cutting perimeter when a hot spot is found. At Palmer Park, roughly one-third of the park's trees were lost.

"We will definitely seek Federal grants for some tree planting," Huizenga said. "We'll incorporate a new mix of species, both deciduous and evergreen."

Huizenga said the Parks Department crews would provide labor to plant the trees to leverage the value of any grant dollars. Tree planting will begin in 2005.

Firewood Restrictions

Infested ash trees must be chipped and burned to prevent the spread of infestation. Because camp firewood is a known carrier of the emerald ash borer, campers in Michigan parks this summer will not be allowed to bring their own wood. Only firewood purchased at the park will be permitted.

Green Places

For more information, or to join our mailing list call Kent County Parks:

Tel: (616) 336-PARK (7275)

Web: www.accesskent.com/parks

Bettes Memorial
Brewer
Caledonia Lakeside
Chief Hazy Cloud
Coldwater River
Cooper Creek
Creekside
Douglas Walker
Dutton Shadyside
Dwight Lydell
Fallasburg
Fisk Knob
Gordon
Johnson (Henry)
Kent Trails
Knapp Valley Forest
Lamoreaux (Donald J.)
Lamoreaux Memorial
Long Lake
Lowell Regional
Luton
Millennium
Myers Lake
Palmer
Paris
Pickerel Lake
Provin Trails
Rogue River
Ruehs
Seidman
Spencer Forest
Thornapple
Thornapple Riverbend
Townsend (Warren)
Wabasis Lake Park & Campground
Wahlfield
White Pine

Kent County Parks Department

1700 Butterworth Drive SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49544

