



Green Places

Summer, 2005 • Kent County Parks Department

Field of Dreams

The Generosity Continues as Comstock Park Rotary and Community Volunteers Build an Access-Friendly Playground at Wahlfield Park

A Hollywood fantasy is the genesis of the phrase, "Build it and they will come." The amazing growth of Wahlfield Park is no fantasy. It's a dream come true, an accomplishment of enormous generosity and community spirit. So many people have contributed that a better phrase might be, "Ask and they will help."

Fritz Wahlfield and his wife Marlene donated the initial property for the park that is their namesake. The Comstock Park Rotary raised \$100,000 for a very special playground and Kent County contributed another \$50,000. This highly access-friendly playground will be completed within the next few weeks. It will be one of the largest playgrounds in Kent County. It's more than just friendly. It's fun on wheels. A special circular path of pavement surrounds the playground. The path undulates with gentle whoop-di-dos that add excitement and entertainment. While Kent County Parks prides itself on the accessibility of all of its parks and playgrounds to everyone walking, running or rolling, this playground goes far beyond run of the mill. Mark Vysoky is the Park Development Manager, a landscape architect who helped design the park. "We're creating opportunities for differently-abled children to use their senses; feeling, touching, finding things to enjoy that they don't have on other playgrounds," says Mark.

As the playground objects, ramps and structures arrive, volunteers from the community converge on Wahlfield Park to put it all together. Dozens of volunteers are lifting, attaching, fastening, and spreading ground



County Commissioner Fritz Wahlfield and his wife Marlene started something big, 20 years ago, by donating 50 acres. The park grew with a 250-acre Centennial Farm acquisition in 2002, and now will have one of the largest playgrounds in Kent County.

cover, donating hundreds of hours. The special ground cover cushions, yet compacts well enough to navigate in a wheelchair.

Nearby, two open shelters with grills, and a nature trail leading to a bridge over picturesque Mill Creek are all access or stroller-friendly. The master plan for Wahlfield Park was developed two years ago, and is an ongoing project.



Bill Boluyt's Encore

Parks are Bill's passion. Retired after 56 years as a full time Kent County Parks employee, it was hard to say goodbye to Bill Boluyt, and hard for the Department to lose his lifetime of expertise. So we're delighted to be saying "hello" again as Bill returns to the Kent County Parks System. Bill is now cutting and replacing trees he planted half a century ago. In honor of his long, excellent service, the County named the first week in April Bill Boluyt Week. Bravo Bill!

IN THIS ISSUE

- Nature Cabin Batty for Bats
- Foundation News and Events
- Artists in the Parks
- Send Your Best Digital Images
- Mark Your Calendar



Five Bright, Shiny, New Playgrounds

This summer you'll see that the county has upgraded five playgrounds with beautiful, new equipment that will delight kids. The playgrounds have been completely replaced at Dwight Lydell Park, Long Lake Park, Johnson Park (right), Douglas Walker Park and Fallasburg Park.





Above: OBC brings several species of live bats, including the African fruit bat, the big brown bat and the vampire bat, to the Nature Cabin.

Right: Children can see these strange, sonar guided flying mammals up close.



Mary, the Slightly Eccentric Nature Lady is Batty for Bats at Wabasis Lake Campground

SMALL FRIENDS THAT FLAP IN THE NIGHT

The Nature Cabin at Wabasis Lake Campground fills up with 40 or more kids several times each day, when Mary the Slightly Eccentric Nature Lady celebrates Bat Week. The Nature Cabin is for storytelling and activities, and no theme gets bigger smiles than bats! Bat Week is an event for Wabasis Lake Campground Campers only. Here's where kids learn that in spite of their evil reputation, bats are true buddies. Each bat eats thousands

of mosquitoes each week, and because bats also eat berries, bats distribute new fruit plants as the seeds pass through their airborne bodies.

Bat Week includes a fascinating presentation by the Organization for Bat Conservation, a nationally known

group from the Cranbrook Institute of Science. Kids learn how to care for bats in the environment, learn how bat houses are made, and participate in bat-related crafts and activities.

There are nine species of bats native to Michigan, and the best time to see them is at dusk. Many Michigan bats are small, and you may have seen them, thinking they were moths or small birds.

Wabasis Lake Campground is located at 11220 Springhill Drive, in Greenville. The Nature Cabin is near the Southeast corner of the campground. Call (616) 691-8056 for more information.



Mary with one of her many young guests.

The GreenS.P.A.C.E. Awards

Fundraiser Fun

August 3, in Townsend Park, you'll hear some hearty laughter. The second annual fundraiser brunch for the Kent County Parks Foundation is called **The GreenS.P.A.C.E. Awards**. The event will celebrate people who have made great contributions to Kent County Parks. WOOD TV8's Brian Sterling hosts this year's fundraiser. The sponsorships and donations now being collected for the event will raise \$100,000 for the parks system.

Address checks to the Kent County Parks Foundation at P.O. Box 230165, Grand Rapids, MI, 49523-0165. A portion of your contribution is tax deductible, and sponsorships may also be paid by credit card.

For further information on sponsorship opportunities, contact Susan Waddell at (616) 742-6594, email swaddell@smggr.com, or log onto www.kentcountyparksfoundation.org.

PARKS FOUNDATION NEWS

New Parks Foundation Website Launched

Convenient Access to All Kent County Parks Information and Foundation Services

Log onto www.kentcountyparksfoundation.org and you'll find a website that shows you one of our area's most important resources. Click on the tabs across the top and get access to information about the entire parks system, its activities, funding and support. Download any of 35 maps of parks, trails, a golf course and campgrounds. Learn about news and seasonal events, including storytelling, art in the park exhibits, events for pets and more. Learn about the Foundation, and how it helps improve public parks and protects our greenspaces. Meet the people who keep it going, and see the Foundation Goals. Finally, the new website provides an excellent way you can contribute to the Foundation and consequently, to future generations who deserve to inherit the same natural beauty we enjoy.



Help Support and Expand Park Programs

Programs like Bard's Bonfire and the bat preservation presentations at the Nature Cabin at Wabasis Lake Campground are examples of superb educational opportunities that build a sense of community and an appreciation for our natural wonders. The Kent County Parks Foundation needs your contributions to maintain and expand programs like these. In addition, the Foundation wants your input as to future programs. Log onto www.kentcountyparksfoundation.org to make suggestions and learn how you can support these fine park programs.





ARTISTS GATHER IN THE PARK

On weekends every now and then this summer, you'll see easels and artists scattered around Fallsburg Park. One of the nation's leading pastel artists, Jim Markle, conducts workshops for anyone wanting to develop skills with pastels. Jim is a Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America, a Master Member of the Great Lakes Plein Air Painter's Association, past president of the Great Lakes Pastel Society and Grand Valley Artists. Jim Markle has been exhibited in galleries internationally and travels the world painting with soft pastels. And, in all his travels, Fallsburg Park remains one of his favorite places to set up an easel and capture the landscape. "With the varied terrain, forested groves, the stream, the bridges, there are a lot of things to paint. In fall, the color by the water is gorgeous. It's convenient to park, you walk ten steps from your car and there's something beautiful." Jim recommends outdoor pastellists have a hat and sun block in their kit of supplies. He says working fairly small, 9X12



Pastel painting by Jim Markle, done as a demonstration at one of his workshops.

or so, is important when trying to capture the light because the sun moves so fast that in an hour and a half, the shadows have moved and you have a different scene. Keep the easel itself in the shade because direct sunlight on the painting surface distorts the color. For information about upcoming workshops, email Jim at jimmarkleo@yahoo.com, please use "Classes" as the email subject header.

Calling All Shutterbugs!

Send Your Best Digital Images to Support Kent County Parks

If you love to take pictures, we'd love to show them. You can get your digital photos published and can help show others the fun and beauty of Kent County Parks and Trails. Selected photos will be used in newsletters, posters, brochures and the Kent County Parks Foundation website. You'll get a photo credit each time one of your images is used. Submission of digital images is taken as a charitable act, with an agreement that the photo may be published, reprinted or used by the Kent County Parks Department to promote or help in the advancement of parks and trails in Kent County. Photos submitted will be used for no other purpose.

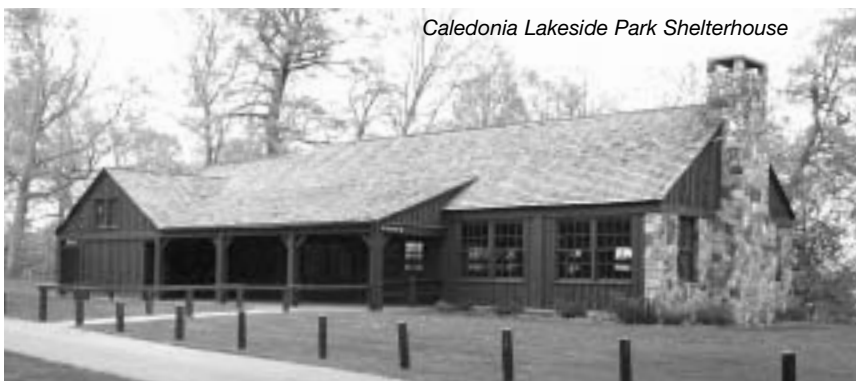
Here's how to send your photos.

Submissions must be JPEG format and of e-mailable size—preferably larger than 200 Kbytes but less than 1 megabyte. Limit the number of your submissions to a maximum of 10 images to give many people a chance to participate. E-Mail your best JPEG images as attachments to park.photos@kentcounty.org.

Photos must be taken in Kent County Parks or Trails. We look for photos about:

- Nature's beauty
- People Enjoying the Great Outdoors
- Pets and Critters
- Park Sports

Get out there and have fun. And don't forget your camera!



Caledonia Lakeside Park Shelterhouse

You're Invited...

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 2006 events today! (campground sites excluded.)

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



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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Spinning Tales by the Bonfire at Lamoreaux Park

The Nature Society of Western Michigan, Kent County Parks, local musicians and the Story Spinners of Grand Rapids will again be hosting the Summer Bards' Bonfires at Lamoreaux Park. The program is free. Enjoy story telling and local musical talent, as you gather around a beautiful bonfire. Bring your blanket, bug spray, lawn chairs and your favorite story to share, or just come to be entertained.



The programs will be at 9:00 to 11:00 p.m. on three Fridays, June 24th, July 22nd and August 26th. Lamoreaux Park is located on Coit Avenue NE near Bailey Drive, north of 4 Mile Road.

4th of July Community Celebration at Caledonia Lakeside Park

The village of Caledonia, working with the township, is getting ready for their annual Independence Day Celebration. In addition to baseball games, playground fun and picnicking there will be an antique tractor-pull. "We have one of the few specially prepared fields made for tractor pulls, and these antiques are really fun to watch," says Park Manager, Clint Keeney. Just at dark, there will be fantastic fireworks, reflected in beautiful Emmons Lake. Caledonia Lakeside Park is located at 370 Lake Street in Caledonia. For Information: Terry Mulvihill (616) 891-9974.



**For more information, or to join our mailing list, call Kent County Parks
 Tel: (616) 336-PARK (7275)
 Web: www.accesskent.com/parks
www.kentcountyparksfoundation.org**

West Michigan Amateur Golf Tournament to Benefit Community

The ever-popular West Michigan Amateur will get underway at L.E.Kaufman Golf Course, Kent County Parks' premier golf facility, on the 9th and 10th of July.

The West Michigan Amateur is largest of the four major tournaments held in this area. 215 players will start on Saturday, and by Sunday evening, after all the elimination rounds, the winners will be walking to the clubhouse with brand new bragging rights, gift certificates and their names in the record books. Tee times are staggered, starting at 7:30 Saturday morning.

The \$65 entry fee benefits the community in several ways. After greens fees and promotion, the money helps support Kent County Parks, as well as a scholarship fund for Grand Rapids Community College.

Applications to play can be picked up at L.E. Kaufman Golf Course, 4807 Clyde Park Avenue SW, Wyoming. Tel: (616) 538-5050, or can be acquired at www.westmichigan-golf.com.

Spectators are welcome. Bring a picnic basket and make it a day with the family.