

Kent COUNTY *Detail*

July/August 2009

Administration

County Designated as a Recovery Zone

At the August 13, 2009 Board of Commissioners meeting, action was taken to designate the geographic area of Kent County as a “Recovery Zone” pursuant to the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. As part of the process, The Right Place, Inc. will be the conduit through which applications can be made for the \$54,857,000 in Recovery Zone Facility Bonds available for private companies/developers to issue. The Right Place, Inc. has developed, in concert with County staff, criteria related to applying for these funds. Information regarding the Recovery Zone Facility Bonds can be obtained by contacting Rick Chapla, Vice President, Business Development, The Right Place, Inc. at 616-771-0328.

Parks Department



Mowing Reduction Strategy

Starting in 2006, the acreage mowed in eight County Parks has been reduced by a total of 100 acres. Parks also has done controlled burns in several locations to encourage re-emergence of native species. In areas that continue on the mowing schedule, frequency of mowing has decreased, which in turn has reduced fuel use, emissions, and labor costs. Signs (shown at left) are posted so the public has information about the naturalization efforts.

Veterans Affairs Office

Beginning August 31, 2009, office visits for Veterans Services will be temporarily suspended at West Side Complex and will be scheduled by appointment only. For appointments and inquiries please call 616-336-3492.

Health Department

Health Notes

A service of the Kent County Health Department

August 2009: What ever happened to H1N1?

This spring, we saw a barrage of information related to a new virus first known as “swine flu,” later known as novel H1N1. As it became evident that the severity of the sickness is comparable to that of the seasonal flu, people heaved a sigh of relief and seemed to forget that it ever happened.

There are several good reasons to stay alert:

- ❖ We are in the middle of a global flu pandemic and the novel H1N1 virus is still spreading.
- ❖ The number of countries reporting cases is nearly doubling.
- ❖ The Southern Hemisphere’s regular flu season has begun and countries there are reporting that the virus is spreading and causing illness along with regular seasonal influenza viruses.

The United States has seen significant illness this summer and continues to report the largest number of novel H1N1 cases of any country worldwide. Given ongoing novel H1N1 activity to date, the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention anticipates that there will be more cases, more hospitalizations, and more deaths associated with this pandemic in the United States over the summer and into the fall and winter.

Of course, this isn’t meant to scare anyone. To put it in perspective, the seasonal flu causes 200,000 hospitalizations and 33,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. Most people who become ill with seasonal flu, like novel H1N1 virus, recover without medical treatment.

So the message remains: this is the time for caution, not panic.

What are people in public health doing to protect you?

- ❖ Manufacturers are hard at work producing a vaccine for novel H1N1.
- ❖ Local health departments are devising plans to disseminate these vaccines, when they are delivered.
- ❖ This vaccine will be provided by the federal government, and will be separate from the seasonal flu shot. It could involve more than one dose.
- ❖ It’s uncertain when the novel H1N1 vaccine will be available, but manufacturers are working closely with health agencies to have it ready for the fall.
- ❖ In addition, certain groups that have been harder hit by novel H1N1 – pregnant women and people with certain chronic illnesses, for example – will take priority in receiving the vaccine.

Stay tuned this fall to see how you can **protect yourself** from novel H1N1 through vaccination.

Each year, getting vaccinated is the number one way to avoid contracting the seasonal flu. While it won't guarantee that you won't get sick, it can provide some immunity and, in the event you become sick, shorten the severity and duration of illness.

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind is that there are always simple things you can do to avoid getting sick. These include **washing hands often** with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, staying away from people who are sick, and avoiding touching your face (which spreads the germs). If you become ill, **stay home** from work or school to avoid spreading the illness. ***As we head into the flu season this fall, these measures can help you stay healthy.***

The Kent County Health Department has placed links to general information and guidance on H1N1 flu at www.accesskent.com/h1n1flu.

Cooperative Extension



What's the "Buzz" in the Kent MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden?

This summer, Kent County families and the greater Bradford Neighborhood were treated to ten summer evenings in the Grand Ideas Garden where they sampled fruits and veggies, listened to story tellers, zesty music and investigating things that fly, jump, crawl and bark! The "Community Night" project was developed by a team of educators at the MSU Extension office, each of whom hosted an educational session with the

stage of the garden in the background. Local businesses donated popcorn and lemonade for each evening.

Beginning at 6 pm each Wednesday evening since mid-June, people of all ages enjoyed the summer sessions which have included cooking, storytelling and bug hunting. The favorite for many was titled "Jungle Sounds" which hosted over twenty colorful parrots and tropical birds. The bird's personalities filled the garden with a joyful noise and entertained children and adults for the hour and a half session.

While the "Summer in the Garden" series has ended, the fun in the garden continues. Individuals and groups visit to enjoy the plants, take a walk along the brick pathways, listen to the waterfall, and ask questions of the MSU Extension horticulture staff and MSU Master Gardener volunteers about plants that they might like to grow at home. Stop by and see for yourself! The Grand Ideas Garden is located next to the Kent MSU Extension office at 775 Ball Avenue NE, Grand Rapids. We look forward to seeing you soon!

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