



Park Notes

A newsletter of the Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks
1621 Beechwood Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116 651- 698-4543
Volume 25, Number 1 www.friendsoftheparks.org February, 2010

Heritage Park opens



Saint Paul's Eastside Heritage Park is now open - offering trail-head facilities for Bruce Vento Regional trail users and a place to celebrate the area's rich history.

Located on Phalen Boulevard between Payne Avenue and Arcade Street, the park boasts rugged stone and wood restrooms and picnic shelters designed by well known architect Dewey Thornbeck. A large green field offers a place for flying a kite and other outdoor fun, and walking paths make it a great place for a stroll.

What makes the park special, however, is the way it commemorates the Eastside's development over time. Two kiosks include interpretive panels describing the geologic and natural history of the area, famous Eastsiders (Herb Brooks, three Supreme Court Justices and more), cultural and immigrant influences and the Eastside's manufacturing legacy past, present and future.

During the Eastside's industrial heyday just after world War II, 3M, Whirlpool, Hamms' Brewery and Northern Iron provided jobs for residents and produced products used around the globe. Forty years later many industries had left, but by the late 1990's the Phalen Corridor Initiative was revitalizing the area and bringing sources of new jobs, as well as new housing and educational and recreational opportunities. That work continues near the new park, as the former 3M plant is redeveloped into a job center for a new generation of Saint Paul and Eastside workers.

Today, the park is part of the new era of the Eastside. Situated on land once shadowed by the grain silos of the Hamm's Brewery, it is a key link in a network of parks connected by the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. Plans include an additional connection from the park to Payne Avenue, via Aguirre Avenue, named for an Eastside family known for its service to the community and the armed forces.

The next time you are on the Bruce Vento Regional Trail visiting Lake Phalen, Swede Hollow Park or the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, stop by Eastside Heritage Park for a break, and for a chance to learn about this storied part of the city. For more information contact the Phayne Phalen District 5 Planning Council at 651-775-5234.

Article prepared by Sarah Clark and Rich Kramer.

Pedro Park

First steps toward a much needed down town park turned into a giant step with the donation of the Pedro Building at 10th and Robert. When funds are available the building will be removed and a park will be born.

Pedro Luggage has long been a Saint Paul land mark. Carl Pedro, Sr. arrived in Saint Paul from Italy in 1907. He opened his business shortly there after. The business

moved into the building at 10th and Robert in the 1960 where it remained until closing about a year ago. The property and buildings, valued at \$2.5 million were donated by the Pedro family to the City for development as a park.

The economic value of parks and open space is increasingly clear. For several years a citizen group worked on a plan to put a park somewhere in the northern part of downtown. The working name for the yet-to-be-sited park is Fitzgerald Park. "One of the biggest lessons we learned during the Fitzgerald Park Planning Process was that the area was perceived by developers and prospective residents as being 'amenity poor' said Bob Spaulding who participated in the planning process.

This is the most populous downtown neighborhood and many residents exclusively use public transportation, walk or bike to their destinations. There is no public green space for either formal or informal community gatherings. At least two developers who responded to the Request for Proposal to develop the Penfield Project, a proposed apartment/grocery/retail project, said that the block lacked quality views for a marketable high rise, and without the park, it lacked high quality public space for it to be a marketable low-rise.

"Pedro Park will be a permanent asset that will define and attract people and companies downtown for generations and centuries to come," said Spaulding.

Others agree with Spaulding's assessment. Recalling a previous downtown park, real estate developer John Mannillo said, "The real estate values around Mears Park increased dramatically soon after the renovation of that park in 1992." And real estate values are not all. Mears Park now has a vibrant volunteer cadre of neighbors who tend gardens, promote events and ensure that holiday lights make Mears Park a downtown destination.

The Pedro family donation is a giant step forward, but much lies ahead. The city does not have money in place to develop the park.

Riverside Park

Cleanup costs could well be the tipping point between commercial or residential development and park development. That is exactly how Saint Paul came into possession of its newest park-to-be.

When Koch Refinery and Mobile Oil shut down tank farm operations along West Seventh street in 1995, the city and the neighbors began sizing up the alternatives. At the end of the day, the area will become a 36-acre park, largely because clean up costs to residential standards were prohibitive. In late October, ExxonMobile agreed to turn over the chunk of land to the city for \$1.00 with ExxonMobile providing \$5 million for cleanup. Restricted covenants require that the land remain parkland in perpetuity and can not be used for housing or commercial development, according to the agreement.

Four feet of clean dirt will cover the property and it will take a number of years to clean the site. The West 7th Street Federation will start a community process to help define the type of park needed and wanted by the neighborhood. It will provide access to the Mississippi river for West 7th Street residents.

In addition to getting rid of the ugly tank farm and getting a new park, area residents may also get a bonus, increased property values. A study done in 2005 by the Wilder Foundation confirms that parks, nature preserves and green-ways, wetlands and lakes all have a positive effect on nearby property values.

Volunteer some time

Volunteers are needed to help restore natural and endangered areas along the Mississippi, Minnesota and Saint Croix River Valleys. Volunteers will help plant trees and seedlings, spread native seeds and remove invasive shrubs like buckthorn and tartarian honeysuckle and invasive weeds.

Great River Greening is seeking veterans who know the ropes as well as budding environmentalists who are willing to receive training to become volunteer supervisors. Volunteer supervisors will lead groups of 8-10 who will pull, dig, haul and plant. New supervisors are paired with more experienced volunteers until they are comfortable working as a crew leader.

For more information contact Mark Turbak at volunteer@greatrivergreening.org or call 651-655-9500 X 11.

Green Stairs:

When good intentions go awry or does every stairway need a matching elevator?

With a firm and simple NO, Washington, DC American with Disabilities Act (ADA) staff rejected Saint Paul's proposal for a \$2 million Recovery Act (economic stimulus funding) grant to reconstruct the fabled Green Stairs on Saint Paul's Westside. The rejection is a bitter blow to those who have worked hard to replace the amenity. It is not a simple story and so far there is no happy ending.

The original wooden stairs, built in the 1890's, extended from the bluffs on the west side to Wabasha Street near the entrances to the Wabasha caves. Those stairs were replaced by steel stairs in 1916. Remarkably, the 1916 steps carried pedestrians and exercisers until they were damaged by a falling boulder and had to be removed in May, 2008. Annual maintenance had cost the city about \$16,000.

Saint Paul Public Works created plans to raise the tower to the top of the bluff and build a plaza there as well as a plaza at the Wabasha level. Both plazas would have etchings in concrete telling the history of the stairs and the neighborhood. The plazas and the etchings would be handicapped accessible and have handicapped parking places and sidewalks approaching the plazas were designed to be fully accessible.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Council and Saint Paul's People with Disabilities advisory team approved the proposal. So far so good. But then things went off the treads, so to speak. The ADA staff in Washington rejected the stairs unless the structure also included an elevator.

An elevator is not feasible because of construction, maintenance and safety issues. "Saint Paul originally had 210 public stairs, but that number is now only 70. Saint Paul is a city built on bluffs and these stairways facilitated pedestrian traffic. In an era when we are trying to encourage people to walk and exercise, requiring an elevator next to every public stair case seems like an extreme application of the very valid principles of ADA," said Friends' Executive Director Peggy Lynch.

Mayor Chris Coleman has discussed the issue with US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Rep. Betty McCollum has requested approval for the original design .

Friends anniversary in May

The Friends will celebrate 25 years of advocating for parks, trails and open spaces in Ramsey Count at an anniversary celebration at Harriet Island May 23, 2010 from 1:00 - 4:00. Save the date and help us celebrate our shared achievements.

It will be a fun spring party with music, gentle clown, sculling demonstration by the Minnesota Boat Club and birds from the Raptor Center, so mark your calendar.

Tree Sale 2010



2010 trees



Trees as tribute

Now is the time to think trees for 2010. The snow is deep and the ground is frozen but it is not too early to order for spring. The tree sale is officially underway and the tree brochure should be arriving in your mailbox soon. You just might get two reminders this year as we are also putting a brief sale announcement in water bills this year. If you happen to end up with two brochures, please pass your extra along.

The tree sale is the Friends' only fundraiser. Please consider buying a tree or shrub for your yard and a tree for the parks. Like last year the Friends will contribute a 'tree gator' to accompany all trees donated to parks. The 'gators' are heavy plastic watering bags that zip around the trunk of a young tree. The bag can be filled weekly. The water gradually seeps into the soil thus providing adequate moisture during the tree's first years after transplant. If you donate a tree to the parks and would like to help defray the cost of the tree gators, we would gladly accept an additional \$5.00 donation. Regular watering increases the survival rate of newly transplanted trees and the gators make it possible for parks staff and volunteers to get water to the trees regularly and without most of the water draining off.

Large trees: Autumn Blaze Maple*, Bicolor White Oak*, Black Hills Spruce

Small/midsized trees: Thornless Cockspur Hawthorn, Pagoda Dogwood*, Mount Royal Plum, Honey Crisp Apple

Shrubs: Arrowwood Viburnum*, Little Lamb Hydrangea, Blue Velvet Hypericum, Miss Canada Lilac, Hope for Humanity Rose

Vine: Aunt Dee Wisteria

*denotes native

Visit our Website at www.friendsoftheparks.org for complete descriptions of trees and you can download an order form.

Tribute trees can be planted in most park systems across Ramsey County. If you would like to celebrate a marriage, birth or graduation or recognize an achievement or remember a life well lived, you can purchase a tribute tree for \$75. The trees will be planted by park staff in the spring. We send a certificate to the person being honored and send a map showing the location of their tree after it is planted in the spring.



Hope for Humanity Rose



Aunt Dee Wisteria