

# Pottawatomie & Beyond...

A publication provided for the community by St. Charles Park District

Fall 2009

## St. Charles Dance Academy Keeps Young People on Their Toes

There is something distinctive and recognizable about dancers – the way they stand so straight, as if a balloon were attached to the top of their heads, lifting them gently skyward. Shoulders back, head erect, trained dancers epitomize grace and poise. But along with their elegance and agility, dance students are also masters of discipline and focus, of concentration and cooperation. In addition to being a demanding form of physical exercise and a rewarding outlet for creative expression, the study of dance also instills a wealth of positive, character-building attributes that reflect far beyond a studio's mirrored walls.

academic and workplace environments: imagination and innovation; persistence and dedication; tolerance and collaboration. Although there is no doubt that these are key components of every form of dance education, can such critical developmental functions really come from performing a series of step-ball-change combinations to the tune of “Zippity Doo Dah?”

“Absolutely,” says Monica Noble-Lawson, recital coordinator and instructor for the St. Charles Dance Academy programs offered by the Park District. “It really does flow over into a lot of other things. You

simply have to pay attention.” Makes sense: if Becky jumps to the right while her classmates are leaping to the left, the consequences could be akin to a ten-car pileup on the Stevenson.

To avoid such terpsichorean disasters, the Dance Academy's instructors start forming a dancer's mind-

set early. “I tell children on their first day: when you walk through this door, you're a ballerina,” says Noble-Lawson. “We're here for a reason. We're here to be dancers, and that carries through everything we do in this room. It just stays with them.”

Not all classes are ballet, of course, though its structure and athletic conditioning provide the foundation for so many other forms of dance. Tap, Hip-Hop, and Irish Step Dancing are also offered. But whether they're performing *plies* and *jetes* in pink tights and black leotards in ballet class, or

vamping through cat walks and fan kicks during jazz lessons, students as young as three years of age can begin a journey that will increase their physical development, stimulate their creative imaginations, sharpen their communication skills, and enhance their self-esteem.

Physical conditioning starts before any specific steps or routines can be learned. The first classes in any session focus on flexibility, stretching, technique, and barre work. Though young Margot Fonteyns and Savion Glovers may be chomping at the bit to start hoofin' it across the floor, Noble-Lawson cautions that, no matter what form of dance, the basics must be mastered first. Students must learn how to move safely, achieving control and balance via a range of both expansive movements and fine motor skills. “We focus a lot on the conditioning because all that carries through to the routine. If you don't have that right, the routine's going to be a mess,” she says.

Those routines, those specific combinations of steps and accompanying arm movements, are one person's way of reacting to and interpreting music non-verbally. That person is called the choreographer, and while his or her vision is the one a student must follow – and follow precisely – it is by no means the only way of responding. As a dancer progresses from beginning to intermediate and finally advanced levels of instruction, they are given the opportunity to choreograph their own dances. By using their imaginations to create thematic motifs, even develop characters and construct narratives, students are learning how to express their ideas and emotions through movement.

And if the dance created is going to be performed by other people, the choreographer must then learn how to translate that concept into reality and communicate it to

*continued on page 4*



The earlier a child begins dance instruction, the sooner these benefits start to appear, primarily in the form of improved sensory and motor skills. And the longer a child stays with it, the more such benefits accrue. College Entrance Examination Board statistics show that children who study dance score an average of 36 points and 15 points higher, respectively, on their verbal and math SATs. Likewise, according to the National Dance Education Organization, dance instruction provides a unique setting for nurturing those skills deemed essential for success in 21st-century

## Park Board President's Message

Looking for something different and inexpensive for your family to do? Want to broaden your resume or life experiences? Autumn is the perfect time of year for people of all ages to enjoy the great outdoors! At a park, on a trail, or even in your own backyard, take a moment to use all of your five senses – sight, smell, feel, taste and hear – as you explore the natural world around you. Of course, when it comes to tasting, you should only sample things that you know are safe. A fun idea for kids: while observing squirrels as they hunt for nuts, parents can bring along some walnuts and a nutcracker to show them how the nuts are opened and give them a taste of what squirrels eat.

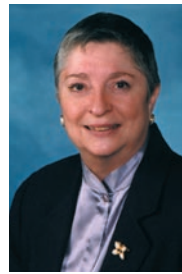
The Park District offers many opportunities as part of America's efforts to preserve and protect local natural areas

including National Public Lands Day and Make A Difference Day. These events are great volunteer projects for community groups and scout troops!

Families may also choose to volunteer for a 'Work Day' – an opportunity to learn about ecological restoration and participate in seed collecting and dispersal, brush cutting, and more.

The District is committed to enriching your life through excellence in program, parks, facilities and services. Please let us know how we can best serve your park and recreation needs.

Yours truly,



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## Referendum Progress Update

### Environmental Education Center

Construction bids for the new environmental education center were approved by the Park Board at its meetings on May 26 and June 9. The facility, which has yet to be named, will include a variety of educational, interactive exhibits for people of all ages. Displays will focus on the natural history of the park's natural area, specifically its woodland, wetland, prairie and savanna environments. The center and the park's natural areas will enlighten visitors to the elements of nature in their own community, according to Director James Breen.

The Environmental Education Center will feature LEED (The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified architectural criteria which measures how well a building or community performs in energy savings, water efficiency, Co2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts. The building and grounds will feature many green elements such as a geothermal heating system, extra insulation, insulated glass, reflective roof membrane, a roof garden



at the main entrance canopy, rain garden and irrigation system, building components made from renewable and recycled resources, etc. Many "green" elements will be suitable for incorporating into both new and existing homes and businesses.

In anticipation of the new building, the District's restoration staff is working on the area just west of the future environmental education center to restore a savanna, an ecological community that features scattered trees and large areas of grasses and forbs (non-grass flowering plants). Non-native turf grass beneath the site's many white and bur oaks has been herbicided and burned, making way for many varieties of native herbaceous plants and shrubs.

### New Pool Complex

Construction bids for the new pool complex at West Side Community Park (formerly Campton Hills Park) were approved by the Park Board at its meetings on March 10 and 24. The facility, to be named the Otter Cove Aquatic Park, will include a zero depth activity pool, a shallow toddler pool, eight lap lanes, a tube slide, a drop body slide, diving boards, a concession area, and a lazy river. The aquatic park will be themed around a river otter and his friends. Construction will begin pending approval of the Illinois Department of Public Health, which is charged with the responsibility of reviewing pool plans.

## Campton Hills Park Now Named West Side Community Park

The Park Board unanimously approved the renaming of Campton Hills Park to the West Side Community Park at its meeting on April 14. The name was changed to better reflect its geographical location and end confusion that has existed regarding ownership of the park. The park, located on the corner of Camp-ton Hills and Peck Roads, is owned by the Park District, not by the Village of Campton Hills, whose residents must pay non-resident rates for facility usage.

## Randall Road Bike Bridge Links Bicycle Trails

A new bike/pedestrian bridge will soon span Randall Road directly north of Silver Glen Road. The bridge, in the planning process for many years, will tie together the Randall Road bike trail, the Great Western Trail and the Fox River Trail.

Director Jim Breen said “the bridge will provide much safer access for all bikers and pedestrians.” Construction is expected to be completed by December 2009.

The \$2.5 million dollar bridge is funded by \$2,023,000 in State and Federal grants; the balance will be funded by the St. Charles Park District and Kane County Forest Preserve District.



## Progress Continues on River Erosion Control Project

Aiming to reduce erosion and protect water quality, the Park District has embarked on extensive shoreline stabilization projects at Mt. St. Mary Park and Boy Scout Island. Staff are working to remove all of the invasive species of plants and a majority of the non-native plants and replanting both shorelines with native, water-tolerant grasses and shrubs. The Army Corps has authorized the use of some stone and boulders in select areas to aid in the shoreline stabilization and plant establishment. To ensure that adequate pedestrian access to the shoreline is maintained at both parks, additional features will be included as the progress continues.

While the primary goal is to slow erosion, the projects also will greatly reduce the amount of nonpoint source pollution (NPS) entering the Fox River. NPS is the

diffuse, intermittent runoff of pollutants from various sources including lawns, sidewalks, streets and parking lots. Precipitation flowing over these sources picks up pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, salts and vehicle fluids, and carries them into rivers, lakes and groundwater.

Along the shoreline areas of Mt. St. Mary Park and Boy Scout Island, Canada geese have contributed to this pollution with their high population density and the amount of waste they produce. The tender, low-profile grasses and other non-native vegetation at the parks created ideal habitat for this waterfowl; replacing these plants with taller, native species should help act to discourage the geese from visiting the park.

Additional contributing factors to the river’s water pollution and sedimentation issues are frequent and sometimes severe water level fluctuations, combined with swift eroding currents. Without durable native and flood-tolerant plant material along the shorelines, the riverbanks become susceptible to erosion, washing away riverfront and polluting it with sediment.

Native plants have long root systems to keep soils in place, absorb runoff and filter out NPS.

By planting a “buffer strip” along the shoreline of Mt. St. Mary Park, the vegetation will help filter out pollutants from surface flow before they reach the river, and also help to stabilize the streambank.



To help fund these projects, the Park District received a grant through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, which receives federal funds through Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act to help implement Illinois’ Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program. The purpose of the Program is to work cooperatively with local units of government and other organizations toward the mutual goal of protecting the quality of water in the State of Illinois.

## The St. Charles Park District has a farm... E-I-E-I-O!

The skies were blue, the grass was green and the rooster crowed as people of all ages ventured out to celebrate the grand opening of Primrose Farm on May 31. Families enjoyed hay wagon rides, touring the historic buildings and seeing a variety of farm animals.

Pictured from left to right are members of the Park Board, Park Foundation and District staff: *front row* Louise van Delft, Janet English, Julie Miller-Longo, Gloria Klimek, John Kerr and Nancy Cox; *back row* Kevin Gaffney, John Wessel, Jim Sitta, Kirk Bunke, Bob Thomson, Fred Norris, Sr., Jim Breen and Jim Cooke.



## Park District Receives Development Grant for Improvements to River Bend Community Park

The Park District has received a \$400,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and is designated to receive an additional \$100,000 grant from the State for improvements at River Bend Community Park, a 45.8 acre park located on the corner of Courier and Geneva Avenues in the Valley View area.

Grant funding will augment Park District funds and will be used to construct a playground, dog park, skate park, community garden area, picnic area, shelters, basketball courts, baseball/softball fields, multi-purpose play fields, fishing pier, 1.5-mile trail system, and a bio-swale in the parking lot.

The property was used by the State of Illinois for a Youth Center until 2007 when the Kane County Forest Preserve District purchased the land for \$3.6 million and leased it to the Park District for 50 years. The new park is tentatively scheduled to be completed in Fall 2010.



## St. Charles Dance Academy

*continued from page 1*

fellow students. To do so, a dancer must know how to think logically, to break a concept down into individual components, and then put it back together again so that it all moves smoothly. “Choreography is much more complicated than people think,” says Noble-Lawson. “Dancers need to learn formations – a circle, a line, or a triangle – and know who is moving where and on what counts. They need to know how to make two 8-count pieces flow together so it doesn’t look like two separate functions.”

The end result of all this preparation is, of course, a performance in front of an audience. Sometimes that audience can be as small as the instructor and one’s classmates. Sometimes it’s just in front of the moms who are invited to watch what’s going on in the studio. But mostly, students are working toward one goal, one very big goal: an annual recital in front of nine hundred people at the Norris Cultural Arts Center. And while such an objective sounds daunting to the average person, for dance students, it’s the culmination of all they’ve been working for.

That quintessential dancer’s poise and self-confidence is a direct result of this “mission accomplished,” according to Noble-Lawson. “I think getting on stage, working in a group, smiling and dancing their hearts out in front of so many...I think you get off stage, and you’re on top of the world after that,” she says. “To see dancers, especially first-timers who might have been scared to death, come off stage and say, ‘I did it! I did it!’ – that’s my reward. That’s why I do what I do.”

It’s also why many students stay with dance from the time they’re in preschool all the way through college, where today, several of the Dance Academy’s students are dance majors so accomplished that they’re fielding numerous scholarship offers. It’s also why two former students who began taking lessons as little girls – Amy Estanislaio and Natalie Monaco – have gone on to become Dance Academy instructors themselves.

An academic major. A professional career. Or maybe just a hobby for a Saturday morning. Buckle up a pair of tap shoes or lace up ballet slippers, and anything is possible.