

Pottawatomie & Beyond...

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

Winter 2011

St. Charles Park District Celebrates One Hundred Years of Community Service

The year was 1911. In England, the luxury ocean liner *Titanic* was launched. In Indianapolis, race cars were revving up for the first time to complete 500 laps at the Speedway. In Pasadena, California, an airplane landed after making the country's first transcontinental flight from New York City.

And in St. Charles, Illinois, a petition was circulated that would establish the St. Charles Township Park District.

It was an initiative whose time had come. Then, just as now, the Fox River was proving to be a great asset to our young city. People from Chicago and points east had discovered its allure, and the Great Western Railway line deposited visitors right to its shores. When a prime parcel of former residential property just blocks north of Main Street was taken over by the railroad, fears arose that this popular recreation location would soon be developed for commercial use.

Such misgivings spurred civic action. Within months, the City of St. Charles had its first park commission, thanks to a petition that was circulated by St. Charles resident, Bert C. Norris, and the land now known as Pottawatomie Park became one of the first public parks in the state to be established under the Illinois Park Act.

It seemed to be the land's destiny. As late as the 1830s, the Potawatomi Indians used it as a campgrounds; then in 1890 a group of businessmen, including Charles Haines and Clinton Wing of St. Charles, converted 35 acres into a private park, and outfitted it with picnic tables and benches, a merry-go-round and swings, and a refreshment stand for ice cream and sodas. Complete with an ornate tower overlooking the Fox River, in 1892 a pavilion was made available for dancing. Nearby, a beach was carved out of the riverbank so the Fox River would be more accessible for boaters and enjoy-



able for swimmers. North of the pavilion, a concession stand also included showers and dressing rooms. Bridges and sidewalks were installed to connect the park to surrounding neighborhoods.

Out of Bad Times Comes Good News

All the new park's amenities, however, weren't enough to hold an old enemy at bay. The Great Depression hit St. Charles as hard as any community. Jobs were scarce and the area was suffering. Once again, a group of civic-minded businessmen stepped up to the plate. In the 1930s, the St. Charles Township Park Board consisted of Col. E. J. Baker, Bertram Turner, and Algert Swanson, father of current Park District Administrative Assistant, Carol Swanson Glemza. He was owner and operator of Swanson Brothers Memorial Works/St. Charles Memorial Works, but Glemza remembers him devoting nearly as much of his time to various city activities as he did to his business.

"My mother considered herself a 'park widow,'" Glemza recalled fondly.

When Swanson became president of a state monument business owners' association, he was required to travel frequently to Washington, D.C., for meetings. This turned out to be a boon for the City of St. Charles at a time when good fortune was hard to come by.

As his daughter recalls, during those meetings, her father came in contact with many influential members of Congress, including United States Senator J. Hamilton Lewis. Swanson became aware of government relief programs to aid troubled cities

and organizations, and convinced his fellow board members to apply for a grant through the Works Progress Administration. Swanson felt such a grant would address two major areas of concern. Improvements to the park were desperately needed, and grant money would allow for the employment of local workers struggling through the Depression.



His persuasive arguments worked. "The whole town was so happy when that telegram came telling us we got the grant," said Glemza. "It really was one of the happiest moments of my life."

continued on page 2

Director Jim Breen Welcomes Retirement



After 38 years in the park and recreational profession, 19 of those years employed as Director of the St. Charles Park District, Jim Breen has announced his upcoming retirement. “Although I’ve thoroughly enjoyed working at the Park District over the years, and plan to keep my permanent residence in St. Charles, I am looking forward to the opportunity of travelling, visiting family and enjoying our recreational facilities. When I

started as Director 19 years ago, I had no idea how long I would be here. During this time period, I have truly enjoyed each and every year. I strongly believe that Park District residents can take pride in the fact that our community’s Park District is one of the finest park and recreational agencies in the entire country. We are a Gold Medal Award winning agency and a six time finalist for this prestigious award”.

As Park District Director, “I greatly appreciate the support the community has given to the District over the years and I extend my thanks to Park District residents, the Board of Park Commissioners, our many volunteers and our full and part-time employees who have worked hard and dedicated themselves to excellence.”

Prior to coming to St. Charles, Breen was employed by the Peoria Park District for 15 years, serving as Supervisor of Planning, Superintendent of Recreation and 5 years as Director of Parks and Recreation. Breen also served as Director of Parks and Recreation in the Town of Redding, Connecticut. Breen is a Certified Park and Recreational Professional and has been involved in a variety of leadership roles in the community. Currently he serves on the Board of Directors of the St. Charles Rotary Foundation, the Board of Directors of the St. Charles Convention & Visitor’s Bureau and as a committee member on the Design Committee of the Downtown St. Charles Partnership. He is past president of the Rotary Club of St. Charles, the Downtown St. Charles Partnership and the St. Charles United Way. Breen also served as campaign chair of the United Way’s fund drive.

Breen holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of New Hampshire and Master of Science degree from Penn State University.

The Board of Park Commissioners hired the firm of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates, Ltd. to conduct a nationwide search for a new director. The Park Board expects the search will conclude in mid-November with a new director starting late this year or early next year. Breen stated that he would assist the new director to ensure a seamless transition. “Once the new director is on board, my last day of employment will be determined by the Park Board.”

St. Charles Park District Celebrates...

continued from page 1

At \$367,500, it was one of the largest WPA grants ever awarded at the time. Along with supplemental funding provided by the Norris family, the park commission was able to complete the Pottawatomie Park amphitheater, fabricate the baseball diamond and adjacent bleachers, and construct a swimming pool complex that included an Olympic-sized pool, children’s wading pool, and bath house made out of native area limestone.

The pool opened on August 6, 1938. “I was the first person to jump in the pool,” recalled Glemza. It was a leap that turned out to be providential in many ways. A few years later, during summer breaks from college at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Carol returned home to work part-time as the pool manager. It was also where she would meet her late husband, Ernest Glemza, who managed the adjacent golf shop.



With such a rich family history associated with it, it was only fitting that in June, 2009, the St. Charles Park District changed the name of Pottawatomie Pool to Swanson Pool in honor of both Carol and her father, Algert.

Landing a Big Name, Buying More Land

The WPA grant also provided the funding for a 9-hole golf course to be laid out along the banks of the Fox River. Again, fortune intervened when the park board began looking for a golf course architect to design the project.

At the time, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., was an up-and-coming name in the field. In fact, the commission to design the Pottawatomie course was just the fifth of his career, one that owed its start to other such WPA projects, mostly in upstate New York. In the case of the St. Charles Township Park District, a personal connection sealed the deal.

“Lester J. Norris knew Robert Trent Jones,” said Glemza, “and that’s how we were able to get him to design the course.”

Work began on the course in May, 1936, and was completed in July, 1939. Inspired by the natural beauty of the Fox River, an abundance of native plants, and the property's lush woodlands, Jones designed a scenic course that became known as the "sportiest 9-hole course in the area." It's an accolade that still holds true. In addition to being the first 9-hole course in



the world — then only one of 234 internationally — to earn the distinguished "Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary" status, Pottawatomie Golf Course ranked 15th best 9-hole course in America in 2010 by Golf World Magazine, one of the sport's most widely-read publications.

The development of both the pool complex and golf course would, however, extend Pottawatomie Park beyond its original boundaries. Through a combination of citizen-approved bond issues and generous gifts from the Lester J. Norris family, the park board was able to acquire the land it needed.

Steadfast Partners, Strategic Partnerships

From the early philanthropic donations of the Norris family to the selfless devotion of time and energy of people like Algert Swanson, such collaborative relationships have been crucial to the Park District's success over the past one hundred years.

In recent times, coordinated efforts by both the St. Charles Park District and the Forest Preserve District of Kane County have resulted in major additions and improvements to the recreational opportunities available to area residents and visitors alike. According to current park

board commissioner and past board president Gloria Klimek, it's a healthy working relationship that addresses both land acquisition and facilities management in ways that neither entity might be able to accomplish individually.

One such example came early in Klimek's now 21-year-long career with the St. Charles Park District board. At the time, several of the farms that comprise present-day Primrose Farm Park were slated to be developed for a residential development. However, working together, the Park and Forest Preserve Districts were able to purchase the acreage that was essential to the Primrose Farm Park design and mission. In the ensuing years, these two agencies have worked closely together — from acquiring an additional twenty acres of land to complete the East Side Sports Complex, to acquiring and developing the new 45-acre River Bend Park that serves the Valley View neighborhood.

The Park District also works cooperatively with the City of St. Charles and Kane County to ensure the development of parks in new and expanding neighborhoods. The City's and County's land/cash dedications ordinances require developers to provide land and/or a cash equivalent to ensure the provision of park land. Through these ordinances, the Park District has acquired and developed numerous neighborhood parks and preserved several natural areas, to include: Artesian Springs, Charlemagne/Kingswood, Cambridge, Harvest Hills, Majestic Oaks, Red Gate and Renaux Manor Parks, Persimmon Woods and Dunham Pond, amongst others. The Park District also has cultivated a strong working relationship with state legislators. In 2002 the Park District received, through special legislation, title to the 345 acre West Side Community Park. This park, then valued at \$26.5 million, was acquired from the State of Illinois for the price of a land survey.

Responsiveness to the citizenry has been a driving mission of the Park District, according to Klimek. Both in-town and neighborhood parks like Lincoln Park and Kehoe ("Rocket") Park and outlying areas

such as Otter Creek Bend Wetland Park and Primrose Farm Park reflect the St. Charles Park District's history of park development that has been driven by the needs of its citizens. "We've always tried to develop parks throughout the district so that they are easily accessible to our residents," said Klimek, and points to a recent project, the purchase of 2.76 acres off Dean and 9th Streets, to create the upcoming Belgium Town Park.

Indeed, the growth of the community has led directly to two of the Park District's newest and most ambitious projects, each of which were approved by Park District residents in a 2008 referendum — Otter Cove Aquatic Park and Hickory Knolls Discovery Center. Slated to open in 2011, Otter Cove will encompass 9.2 acres at the corner of Peck and Campton Hills Roads in the West Side Community Park.

"People had been asking for a west side pool community for as long as I can recall," said Klimek, "especially after booming development projects added a number of new housing communities west of downtown". When completed, Otter Cove Aquatic Park will feature something for every member of the family, including a zero-depth activity pool; a shallow pool for toddlers; an 8-lane lap pool; a tube slide as well as a drop slide; diving boards; and a lazy river.

Just as Otter Cove Aquatic Park's fun-in-the-sun amenities embody the Park District's commitment to cutting-edge recreational opportunities, so, too, does the new Hickory Knolls Discovery Center epitomize its respect for the environment. Known for its strength and longevity, the hickory makes a fitting symbol for the new building, which allows residents to truly discover the hidden gems among the park's gently rolling hills. With nature-based interior design of earth tones and splashes of color that mimic the natural landscape, Hickory Knolls' "green" architecture and energy-efficient operation reflect the Park District's dedication to responsible facilities management.

A Legacy of Leadership

This sort of conscientious stewardship of the land, of course, is integral to the St. Charles Park District's mission, which is

continued on page 4

St. Charles Park District Celebrates...

continued from page 3

“to enrich the quality of life of Park District residents through excellence in programs, parks, facilities and services.” Maintaining 60 parks, including two dedicated Illinois Nature Preserves, the St. Charles Park District encompasses nearly 1,500 acres of park and open space, and provides service to some 48,000 residents of the City of St. Charles, St. Charles Township and portions of the Villages of Wayne and South Elgin.

How to manage this vital role in the community is something that has, like the Park District itself, evolved over time. Early offices, in the 1930s, were housed in the pool complex at Pottawatomie Park. Later, they were relocated to the Municipal Building, and in 1967, moved again to Baker Community Center, where many administrative offices remain to this day. The construction of the Pottawatomie Community



Center in the early 1990s provided much needed space for offices and recreation programs. The center was expanded in 2003 to accommodate the need for additional preschool, youth and older adult programming areas.

Administratively, the Park District, too, has changed with the times. In 1967, voters in both the City and Township approved the formation of the St. Charles Park District as a separate taxing body, with an initial board comprised of five members. As the population grew during the 1970s and '80s, the board make-up increased to seven members.

Both the reliability and quality of leadership at all levels of Park District management have been key to its success, and part of the reason it enjoys a reputation for excellence that is widely recognized. Identified as one of the “Best in the Nation” serving a population of 20,000-50,000 residents, in 1998, the St. Charles Park District received the prestigious National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Manage-

ment, and has placed as a finalist in the competition two additional times.

Klimek credits District employees and the Park Board for this recognition stating, “We have been consistently responsive to the needs of our residents.”

As the St. Charles Park District reflects on its rich and treasured history, it also gazes ahead to its legacy for generations to come. The year ahead will be a time of celebration, a time to acknowledge its heritage and anticipate its future. Along with special weekly and monthly online trivia contests that will test players’

knowledge of the Park District’s history and facilities, the Park District plans a year-long roster of activities and programs that will acknowledge the important century-mark milestone.

With this issue of Pottawatomie & Beyond, the St. Charles Park District introduces a new logo, the centerpiece of the celebration, and one that represents the best of what the Park District offers today. Incorporating key elements of the Park District’s mission, the illustration of a bicyclist pedaling past a leafy green expanse along the water’s edge implies feelings of movement, health, and outdoor fun. Not only is bicycling such an iconic activity, one that appeals to individuals, groups, and families alike, the new logo acknowledges the importance the Park District’s bike trails play in the community.

“I think biking is one of the many leisure activities that St. Charles recognizes us for,” said Klimek. Citing the completion of the Randall Road bike trail and bridge overpass at Silver Glen Road, Klimek acknowledges the role bike trails have played in integrating new and established neighborhoods, parks and forest preserve sites.

As resources become more precious, and the needs of its citizenry become more



diverse, the St. Charles Park District stands poised to be proactive in determining how those resources will be managed and how those desires will be fulfilled. It’s a challenging task, but with one hundred years of exemplary experience to its credit, it is one to which the staff and leadership of the St. Charles Park District look forward.



St. Charles Park Board

James F. Cooke, President
Karrsten Goettel, Vice President
John Kerr, Treasurer
Bob Thomson, Secretary
John Forni, Assistant Secretary
Gloria Klimek, Commissioner
Nancy A. Cox, Commissioner

James O. Breen,
Park District Director