

# President's Message



Molly McClure, CPRP

## BEECH ACRES PARK A COMMUNITY VISION POSSIBLE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Some of you may remember, “back in the day” when park professionals knew exactly what our communities needed. We didn’t bother to ask people their opinion and we rarely asked for their help.

As our tax bases shrunk, and our citizens became more vocal, we were challenged to do more with less. We were forced to survive and thrive by drastically changing the way we conducted our business. We began to engage our citizens in planning, take a hard look at our park systems, and create sound policy and plans based on citizen input to guide us into smarter stewardship of our limited resources.

Through our planning, we determined the formulation of sound equitable, partnerships would be a key factor in enabling our park systems to keep up with the many demands and expanding recreational interests of those we serve. Groups, who wanted programs and facilities for their interests, would need to join us in active planning, fundraising and volunteerism. Marketing became a priority. Communicating the benefits of our services became necessary to prevent major cuts to our budgets. It was critical that people saw our agencies as more than “fun and games”.

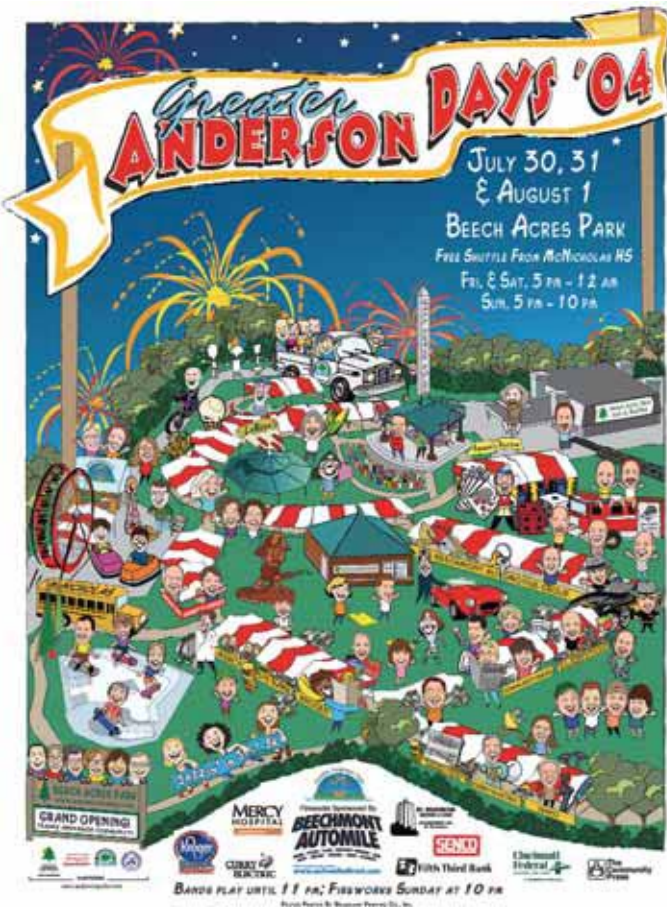
The Ohio Parks and Recreation Association (OPRA) was a huge player in facilitating Ohio’s positive shift. Through our annual conference, workshops, and meetings, we obtained valuable training; we networked and formed relationships with fellow professionals to give us access to cutting edge information applicable to our community. Our voice was heard in the Ohio legislature. OPRA lobbying efforts provided our elected officials with constant reminders of the vital services we provide and the funding we need for the home front. New funding sources were created and old ones were maintained. OPRA also guided us through the arduous task of changing our enabling legislation so we could operate more effectively. OPRA continues to keep Ohio in the spotlight as one of our nation’s leaders for services to parks and recreation professionals.

The Anderson Park District’s story about building Beech Acres Park through partnerships is important because it is our “show and tell” for what can be accomplished through a commitment to change. It is a story of relationship building, trust and engaging equitable partnerships as a way to achieve something where the SUM is GREATER than ALL of the PARTS. I tell this story because I know there are many other small organizations very similar to us...filled with big dreams, limited budgets and enthusiastic staff oozing with passion and desire to make dreams come true. I attribute our success story to OPRA and the park professionals from all over Ohio who gave us ideas, information, motivation and the courage to stick our necks out to accomplish this successful venture. Thanks everybody. To those who are beginning - go for it - but don’t forget to ask for a little help from your friends. Park professionals are so generous.

### BEECH ACRES PARK - ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Beginning in the late 1940’s, when the Anderson Park District was just a twinkle in the eye of the Anderson Township Trustees, generations of Andersonians played in the open space at the Beech Acres General Protestant Orphans’ Home. The fields were created for the benefit of the orphans who lived in cottages on the adjacent 37 acres and the community was invited to share their fields.

Through time, the needs of the orphanage changed, delivery of service to the kids evolved and placement of children into foster homes was preferred. In 1993, the Anderson Park District began a formal partnership with Beech Acres to maintain these fields for community sports use through a lease with hopes to someday own the property. Four years





preserved and the effects of paving paradise were diminished.

An expansive community green is encircled by a 25' wide paved walkway. An amphitheatre, ideal for a variety of events and community productions anchors one end of the "green" and a large pavilion, suitable for all types of gatherings anchors the other end. The "green" provides space to host such APD events as the Art Fair, Concerts and Movies in the Park, and Greater Anderson Days, our annual weekend community-wide celebration. Dozens of Anderson area businesses support the full schedule of activities through sponsorships.

The other portion of the park features soccer fields and ball diamonds, basketball and volleyball courts and a wheels park. Naming rights are available for these popular facilities.

The Anderson Township Government generously pitched in on funding for the 1.5 mile paved trail. The trail serves as a daily fitness track for many.

Greater Anderson Promotes Peace spearheaded the construction of a peace pole project. GAPP, a local not-for-profit organization, provides community-building activities and programs that honor diversity and promote inclusion. The Peace Pole Project is a seven-piece arrangement featuring a granite pole sculpture inscribed with the phrase "Peace On Earth" in numerous languages. Freedom trees and granite benches are incorporated into the symbolic landscape plan to provide functional space suitable for quiet reflection. This area is intended to be a symbol of Anderson's commitment to celebrating diversity. The Peace Pole project is funded entirely through donations and GAPP fund-raisers.

Not only would there be a symbol of peace in this park, but the plan also includes a memorial to pay tribute to current and past firefighters. The Anderson Township Fireman's Association chose Beech Acres Park to build their memorial plaza which includes a five-foot bronze firefighter statue and a listing of all those who have served, paying tribute to past and fallen firefighters. It is a symbol of honor for those who carry on the tradition of service today. The Fireman's Association is raising the required revenue through a variety of fund raising activities. The first phase of the plaza is under construction.

The "wheels park" plan, a 24,000 square foot, state-of-the-art concrete park, was designed with our large, active Skatepark Committee, comprised of teens, young adults and parents.

later, the APD was able to negotiate for the purchase of these important 25 acres to develop the land based on the needs of the Township.

In 2000, it was time for a renewal of the Anderson Park District's operating levy. If passed, the renewal would generate limited funds for capital improvement projects. The public was surveyed to determine their top priorities. Focus groups, written surveys and public hearings showed the Beech Acres Park development as the top choice. The residents firmly felt the Township needed a park with a variety of recreational offerings - a place to build a strong sense of community. The engagement process we followed increased the voters' confidence and the levy passed. As promised, Beech Acres Park would be developed to include our residents' top-priority amenities and to offer a community gathering space that would promote a sense of unity - something that was much needed in Anderson Township.

The APD created a detailed design concept and master plan for the park. The communi-

ty planning team consisted of residents, professionals, staff and individuals representing a variety of recreational interests. When complete, the park's initial design masterfully included the most commonly requested amenities to cater to a wide variety of both passive and active recreational interests - at a cost of 3.5 million dollars.

Since 3.5 million dollars was beyond the APD's capital improvement fund, the park would be built in phases and equitable partnership relationships would be developed.

One of the park's neighbors, Parkside Church, was the first of many partners to become involved in the park's construction. Both the church and the park district needed paved parking. A shared lot was built on parkland that is used by churchgoers primarily on Sunday mornings and by park visitors at other times. The church members provided approximately \$400,000 for the 225 space parking lot. The park district provided the land, \$90,000 of the construction cost, labor, lights and landscaping. What a wise use of resources - sharing is good. Green space was

The committee persuaded the Park Board to answer the cry to include this needed community facility. Phase one, 15,000 sq ft of the design, was built with the available \$200,000 budget and the committee raised an additional \$25,000 to cover the remaining portion of this phase. The committee continues to be active and eager in their efforts to raise the funds for phase two of the plan.

The all-inclusive children's playground is currently in the design phase. The playground committee is working with Cincinnati resident Terri Hendy, a nationally acclaimed playground designer, known for her unique, creative designs. Terri has taken the pulse of our community. With her vast knowledge of children's play and their need for creative activity in a safe environment, children of all abilities will have the opportunity to play side-by-side. Several fundraisers have produced a sizable nest egg that will be used to match the grants we need to build the exciting plan. The "Run to Remember, in memory of Nancy Horn", was inspired, planned and carried out by her friends in partnership with the APD as a way to honor the memory of an exceptional Mom who lost her battle to brain tumors and raise money for APD playgrounds. Nancy's friends and family feel it is so appropriate that Nancy can continue to be positive force for the benefit of children.

The partnership with Beech Acres, the General Protestant Orphans Home expanded in 2004. The APD now leases another 7 acres and a 15,000 sq ft building, The Beech Acres Arts & Recplex, immediately adjacent to the new park. This partnership has enabled the APD's Recreation staff to expand recreational programming to include year-round offerings in space we can call our own, at least for now. We hope to be able to purchase this important property some day but until then, we will nurture our partnership and make the most of this opportunity.

A partnership with the Jason William Hunt Foundation has resulted in the dedication of an Outdoor Leadership Training Center. Jazzin' in July, a 5K race, is the Center's primary fundraiser but also serves as a platform to raise awareness for this outdoor experiential education initiative based at Beech Acres Park.

Beech Acres Park, the community's new treasure, was officially unveiled at the Greater Anderson Days, weekend community event. Businesses, community groups, governmental entities, school officials and folks of all ages came together to celebrate the welcome addition. Despite the rainy weekend, the event was a wonderful success. And the biggest hit was the park itself. Everyone loved it. Compliments were abundant. People agreed that the park had a "great feel"!

Beech Acres Park emerged as a true community park because residents from numerous facets of the Township worked in partnership to help design and raise funds for a monument to peace, a tribute to firefighters, a haven for skate enthusiasts, a trail to enhance fitness, an indoor recreation space, a training center for outdoor experiential education and an inclusive play area.

These items, combined with the park's variety of recreational offerings, have already made Beech Acres Park a huge success. But it has become more than just a park; it has become a terrific testament to what can be accomplished through partnerships and community engagement. Beech Acres Park is a place that unites people together, created by people who united to give their community more.

Thanks for the opportunity to serve and thanks OPRA for all the help you have given the APD along the way!



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