

'Parknership' increases progress for quality of life

On May 7, 2002, the voters of Hamilton County put their trust in the Hamilton County Park District and passed a 15-year, one-mill levy to maintain and improve the park district.

During the levy campaign, we promised to create new partnerships with other public organizations that would improve open space preservation and recreational opportunities in our community. I am pleased to report that great progress has been made during the last three years.

The park district has created the ForeverGreen Conservation Program, setting aside up to \$7.5 million over the life of the levy for use in greenspace preservation partnerships.

In addition, ForeverGreen funding has been leveraged with State "Clean Ohio Funds" to stretch the local investment. Already, partnerships with the Cincinnati Park Board, Anderson Park District, Cleves, Green Township and Delhi Township have resulted in 257



JACK SUTTON
COMMUNITY
PRESS GUEST
COLUMNIST

acres protected. Including partnerships, the park district has been responsible for the protection of an additional 1,284 acres of Hamilton County green-space.

In 2003, The Hamilton County Park District and the Cincinnati Park Board signed a cooperative agreement to improve Fernbank Park, located in Cincinnati's Saylor Park neighborhood.

This "Parknership" enables the Park District to contribute about \$2.7 million in capital improvements as well as assume the operation, maintenance and Ranger patrol of this scenic riverfront park. Some of the capital improvements, including a playground and walking trails, are complete and Fernbank Park is already receiving rave reviews and strong visitation.

In addition, the park district recently signed a cooperative agreement with both the Cincinnati Park Board and the Cincinnati Recreation Commission to jointly develop Armleder Park on the banks of the Little Miami River. Our contribution to this "Parknership" will include a canoe launch, picnic shelters, walking trails and the park district's first "Dog Park."

The Hamilton County Park District has been continuing to develop high quality educational and recreational opportunities for our community. The area's first large-scale children's garden, Highfield Discovery Garden in Glenwood Gardens, opened last year.

Working in conjunction with the state of Ohio, Cincinnati Water Works and the Metropolitan Sewer District, the park district has been constructing an extension of the Little Miami Scenic Trail to Little Miami Golf Center. Since 1988, the park district has worked with the University of Cincinnati's Institute for Policy

Research to receive independent public input. In 2004, 88.4 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way the park district was being run, our highest satisfaction rate yet.

More importantly, respondents felt the park district improves our quality of life with more than 91 percent agreeing that the park district makes Hamilton County a better place to live.

The board, staff and volunteers of the Hamilton County Park District are extremely grateful for support we have received from the citizens of Hamilton County, allowing us to grow to 20 parks and over 15,000 acres preserved.

2005 is our 75th Anniversary and we invite the entire community to celebrate with us by enjoying the nature, recreation and education available at the Hamilton County Park District.

Jack Sutton is director of the Hamilton County Park District.

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