

Harris Township parks improvements and maintenance

By Christine Parkhurst

Harris Township parks have been undergoing improvements, including seating and shade projects. At Harris Township Park at Elm Road, there are two rain gardens that have been growing in; these will remain fenced in while the plants mature. A rain garden is a depressed area in the landscape that collects rainwater from a roof, driveway or street and allows it to soak into the ground. Planted with grasses and flowering perennials, rain gardens can be a cost-effective and beautiful way to reduce runoff of excess water. Rain gardens can also help filter out pollutants in runoff and provide food and shelter for butterflies, songbirds and other wildlife. The rain gardens at Harris Park were created with the help of the St. Joseph Soil and Water Conservation District.

In a stretch of land adjacent to SR23, Ken Lindsay, Harris Township Trustee, commissioned a prairie restoration project using native plants.

“Decades ago the ‘Harris Prairie’ once existed in various nearby places, but it is mostly gone,” said Lindsay. Working with a couple of local nature enthusiasts, John Gensic, an award-winning biology teacher from Penn High, and the township’s landscape architect Lehman and Lehman together designed the restoration. A year ago, they planted seed grasses and flowering plants to fill approximately three acres along SR23. Lindsay said it will take another year or two for the plants to be fully thriving.

“Eventually it should look very pleasant and provide a place for educational events and a buffer between SR 23 traffic and the places in the park where there are usually a lot of people. Sign markers are in place to designate the restoration area.

Current projects include seating areas with roofs for sun shading so people can enjoy a place to sit in the shade. This will come in

handy for parents bringing kids to play so they can find a place to sit sheltered from the sun. Shade trees as mature as they are available are also in the plan. Lindsay said it is estimated by Memorial Day there will be shade and various types of seating, and hopefully some nice smaller grassy areas where one can sit on a blanket in the park. No additional courts are being built and there are no current playground equipment improvements being built.

Lindsay said anytime additions are made to the parks, ongoing maintenance is a huge concern, as the township has no parks department.

“At Elm, everything is on a first-come, first-served basis because we can’t overwhelm the small space with organized sports and the resulting demand on parking and the inevitable need for cleanup.” A community meeting was held for input before the park was built and it was apparent that in the opinions of community members and neighbors, organized events would stress the park.

Lindsay would like to ask the public’s help.

“It has been a juggling act to provide improvements while enduring the consequences of vandalism, littering, inconsideration and other nuisances.” He strongly encouraged everyone to be considerate and pick up their water bottles from the courts; there are convenient trash cans only feet away. Picnic tables have been routinely broken on purpose, fences are damaged, and people have let their dogs run freely on the mulch and elsewhere in the park. Please respect these public parks and the work that continues to go into them to maintain them so they can be enjoyed for years to come.

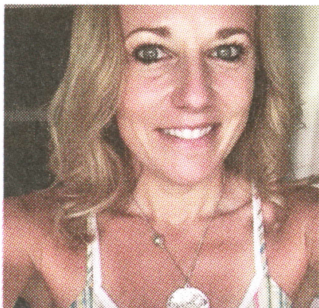
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