

Amphitheater refurbished in Dunham Prairie



The amphitheater located in the Dunham Prairie Preserve, along the Ron Wilmot Walking Trail, has a fresh new look -- compliments of Akron Parks & Recreation Board Member Paul Bernard who replaced and varnished the seating.

By Julie Ann Madden

What's the name of the amphitheater located in the Dunham Prairie Preserve's nature trail along the Ron Wilmot Walking Trail?

Its name is Songbird Amphitheater.

This amphitheater was a dream of past Akron Parks & Recreation Board Member Bob Klemme back in 1992 as the park board members and city officials began expanding the preserve area, which is located just north of Akron's Riverside Cemetery.

"I saw this hill and knew it had to be an amphitheater," Klemme was quoted in the Oct. 29, 1992 edition of the Akron Register-Tribune newspaper.

The preserve expansion was made possible by "countless volunteer hours by park board members, Akron-Westfield FFA members, city employees and other interested persons."

The preserve, which was dedicated May 30, 1992, is a 30-acre parcel of land that was acquired with an Iowa Rural Enhancement & Protection (REAP) grant. The purchase and development was spearheaded by the park board with encouragement of the City of Akron officials.

It was purchased in 1991 with the \$57,240 REAP grant from Roy Dunham and Betty Jacob-

son, both of Akron. The preserve was named after the Dunham family.

The City of Akron holds the title to the land but the state pays the taxes. If the preserve is ever abandoned by city officials, the land will revert to state ownership.

City officials are responsible for maintenance and upkeep, which is largely done by members of the park board and volunteers.

Periodic controlled burns are to be a part of the maintenance program for the seeded prairie areas.

Trees and shrubs were also planted in areas of the

preserve to replace native hardwood trees lost during the development.

In July 1991, approximately 13 acres were seeded with a mixture of native grasses and five varieties of wild flowers to encourage the land to return to its native condition. Three native grass seeds were donated by Pheasant Forever.

The Akron-Westfield FFA, under the direction of then Advisor John Ziniel won an (Building Our American Communities (BOAC) project award for their many hours of volunteer labor and machinery usage plus they

constructed the signs and benches placed along the trail.

By 1992, a system of hiking/biking trails had been developed throughout the park. It included over

20 nature trails and resting stations. The trails were designed to provide access to many scenic areas in the preserve.

The trails were part of the network of hiking/

biking trails that encircled the town of Akron. This four miles of trails ranged from city streets to simple mowed paths. Some trail

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Looks brand new again



photo by Julie Ann Madden

Akron-Westfield teacher Kent Johnson is enjoying his summer vacation sprucing up Akron. Recently, he repainted the Akron City Park's gazebo, which was built in 1997, a memorial tribute to Ed and Alice Willer, Akron residents who had donated \$40,000 for an enclosed park shelter. According to a July 3, 1997 Akron Register-Tribune story, this octagon-shaped structure, 27 feet in diameter, was built instead of a shelter house -- after a Willer family member agreed with the Akron Parks & Recreation Board that three shelters in the park were enough. The cedar boards came precut and ready to assemble. Charlie Von Hagel of Akron assembled the structure. Ray Mohrhauser and Joe Shay did the cement work, which included the foundation and ramp to make it handicapped accessible. Originally, former park board member/A-W teacher Randy Bartels applied a finish to the cedar wood to help protect it from the elements. It was dedicated in the Willers' memory on Oct. 10, 1997 and has held many special events from musical entertainment to weddings over the years.

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