

Eagle Creek Park More... Outdoors Naturally

"The Eagle Creek Park Foundation provides volunteer and financial support to enhance, promote preserve and protect Eagle Creek Park."

What is the Foundation

by Karen LaMere, Park Manager

Just what is the Eagle Creek Park Foundation and what to they do? As park manager I am often asked by visitors "just what is the Eagle Creek Park Foundation and what does it do for the park?" My response is, everything! Over the years they have been involved in the following projects to enhance the park:

- Total renovation of the Nature Center in 1996. This included painting the walls, refinishing the hardwood floors, carpeting the halls and bird observation rooms. They purchased three, \$1,000 custom made windows for the "Window on Wildlife". The total cost for this project was \$25,000.
- ECPF paid for the lumber to construct the bird observation deck on the south side of the building. Volunteers built the deck.
- They also purchased the materials for the deck overlooking the Ecology Pond near 71st Street entrance.
- Foundation volunteers operated a small gift shop in the nature center on the weekends. They sold nature books, Eagle Creek Park t-shirts, field guides and a few snacks. Profits from the shop were used to help offset program costs and supplies at the center.
- The foundation worked jointly with an Eagle Scout to help construct the out-

door cage for the Red-tailed Hawk. The design and layout of the cage had to meet U.S Fish and Wildlife specifications for captive birds of prey.

- The Eagle Creek Park Foundation has gone on to support our bird of prey program by purchasing the material needed to construct outdoor cages for five other birds used in programs. We have housed a screech owl, kestrel, bald eagle, turkey vulture, barred owl, great horned owl and saw-whet owl on the premises.
- If you have ever hiked the fitness trail. It was refurbished with a grant the foundation received from Westview Hospital.
- ECPF was responsible for establishing the "Jazz on the Point" and "In concert with Nature". Ten years ago they wrote and received a grant from the Arts Council to begin the series. For years the musicians played on rickety old risers. The Foundation has built the stage, roofed the stage and purchased the sound system for the concerts.
- Each spring the foundation works with local Wal-Mart's to offer a Free Fishing Derby. It is held on the same weekend DNR hold it's free fishing day. This is a time for kids and parents to learn more about fishing.
- If you enjoy Images of Nature, Renditions of Nature, the Woodcarvers and wood turners event and Celebration of Nature the foundation is responsible for the posters,

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racks the art work is hung on and the programs.

- The most recent project they have completed is the new Earth Discovery Center. The Foundation has been instrumental in getting this facility funded with grants and volunteer efforts.

Under the direction of Kevin Carlsen, the park is in the final stages of completing the transformation of the old nature center into the Ornithology Center. This is due to open in late summer or early fall. The foundation has been responsible for the funding of this project.

These are just a few of the projects you as a park user benefit from. The Eagle Creek Park Foundation is currently working on renovating the fitness trail again, building a connecting trail from 56th to 71st street, and completing the Ornithology Center. Remember your donations to the Eagle Creek Park Foundation stay at Eagle Creek Park. The foundation's mission is to protect and enhance the park for you as park visitors, neighbors and citizens of Marion County.

Making a Difference

by Michelle Cloud, president

We are making a difference. Your support of Eagle Creek Park through the Eagle Creek Park Foundation is showing. The Earth Discovery Center, opened just last year, is reaching thousands of children and adults to introduce them to the wonders of the natural world. It has become "The Destination" to showcase Environmental Education in Indianapolis. Recently, the Puliam Trust, a major donor to the "EDC" held their annual ceremony awarding 27 local not-for-profit organizations a total of \$2.7 million dollars at the Center and the trustees were very impressed with the facility they helped to fund. The Eagle Creek Park Foundation was a recipient of \$30,000 grant to help fund the renovation of the Feldman Nature Center into the Ornithology Center, a state of the art interactive educational facility about birds in Indiana.

We are beginning to see progress on repair of the infrastructure at the Park. Through the unceasing efforts of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Foundation to have the spillway at the Lilly Lake Dam repaired we can now report that the repairs will be completed this fall and the lake allowed to return to its original depth. The paddleboats, absent for so many years will be available again for the enjoyment of park users.

The Foundation, based on a survey of the membership, has identified areas of concern and importance to you and is working with Indy Parks to address these issues. The fitness trail sponsored by Westfield Hospital will be undergoing repairs and needed maintenance. The trail system, the most popular amenity in the park with our member-

ship, will see maintenance and new signage as well as an updated trail map through a generous donation in memory of Dr. Robert Edesess. If you have attended our popular summer concerts at the marina you have seen the new roof over the stage area and that the numerous potholes on the road have been filled.

Our Kids Fishing Derby was supported by nine Wal-Marts in the area this year and their donations will ensure this event will be available next year. The Foundation will be holding our annual Golf Outing on August 7 and it's not too late to get in on the fun. Please save the dates of October 11 and 12 for the Fall Festival in the Park. The Foundation will be hosting family friendly activities under our "Big Top" at the weekend event. Look for more information on our website at www.eaglecreekpark.org.

We have revamped the website and are working to make it possible to renew memberships online. It is now the "go-to" place for information about Eagle Creek Park. We are continuing to make communication with our membership better and welcome your feedback.

The future of Eagle Creek Park will be up to us, and with your help the Eagle Creek Park Foundation aims to enhance, promote, preserve and protect the park for the residents of Indianapolis now and in the future.

Challenges and Opportunities

by Jim Weir, Executive Director

Prior to the idea of building a new nature center, the Eagle Creek Park Foundation (ECPF) functioned as a loosely formed group that responded to the direction of the Eagle Creek Park Manager. Projects were small and many times funded directly by members of the foundation board. A great deal of time was donated by board members and volunteers in completing the projects. Many times the projects were determined by needs that were not being met by Indy Parks because of budget constraints. It was in this atmosphere that the concept of a new nature center began.

Originally the park manager wanted an expanded parking lot for the old nature center, but as discussions proceeded the ideas began to flow and bigger concepts were explored. The first plans called for the building occupied by Peace Learning Center to be taken over and expanded into the new nature center with classrooms, laboratories, an auditorium and offices. Peace Learning Center would be moved into the little farmhouse that was the Ranger Headquarters. Both facilities were going to share the same parking lot, which was located between the two buildings. At that time the Rangers were going to move into Lilly Lodge. Schmidt Associates was hired by ECPF and a plan was created for the renovation of the Peace Learning Center building. It was believed at that time that the renovation would cost between \$1 million and \$2 million. Since ECPF had never raised anywhere near that amount of money, the ECPF board held a retreat and hired Lilya Wagner from the I.U. Center on Philanthropy to educate them on fund raising.

Following the retreat, the board decided to hire a professional development director to lead the fund raising effort. Shortly after the development director came onboard, Indy Parks informed the foun-

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dition that the major funding organizations had indicated that they did not want to be approached by many different entities with funding requests. The development director and the park manager then created a plan to incorporate the requests of four organizations into a campus concept. The four projects were: building the Earth Discover Center and then remodeling the former nature center into an Ornithology Center, remodeling the Peace Learning Center, remodeling Lilly Lodge for the Earth Music Center and creating a soccer complex for Pike Youth Soccer. This campus concept was part of the grant proposal from Indy Parks to Lilly Endowment. The estimated cost of creating this campus was \$10 million. Fund raising efforts began in 2001 to support the campus concept.

As we look back over the past 7 years many changes have taken place. The Eagle Creek Park Foundation achieved success in building the Earth Discovery Center and the remodel of the former nature center into an Ornithology Center is nearly complete. Pike Youth Soccer successfully built the soccer complex. Peace Learning Center still plans to remodel their facility. Unfortunately the Earth Music Center lost momentum when their founder moved out of the area and the remodel of Lilly Lodge was tabled. A great deal has been accomplished; a great deal remains to be done.

It is relatively easy to maintain focus when there is a goal such as the Earth Discovery Center or the Ornithology Center before us. Projects like the roof over the performance stage and the Edesess Trail succeed because the people have a direct passion for the project and support it. There are many instances where lack of maintenance has created infrastructure issues such as the Lilly Lake Dam and pothole riddled roads. These infrastructure issues cannot be funded by ECPF. Our mission is to enhance, promote, preserve and protect the park. Indy Parks and Recreation has the responsibility for stewardship of the park and park maintenance is part of that stewardship. However, there are dozens of opportunities for ECPF to enhance features at the park. The trail system needs better signage and maps to more clearly indicate which trail you are on and where it is going. Opportunities to create expanded programming for families and adults need to be developed. Better utilization of the land west of the reservoir as a vehicle free natural area offers tremendous possibilities.

Obviously all of these opportunities require funds to make them possible. ECPF will pursue every possible funding opportunity, but it is the people who have a passion for the park that will make the biggest difference. We are blessed to have

members who have that passion and realize what a tremendous asset Eagle Creek Park is in our community.

When we conducted interviews in the park last summer regarding why people came to the park, it was interesting to listen to the answers. Nearly all of them began with, "It is my place to..." What followed those words varied greatly from bird watching to picnicking to running to swimming, etc., but the common thread was the sense of ownership.

Our members, the users of the park, have a sense of ownership. Eagle Creek Park is "my place." We know that when we own something we want to 1) make it the best it can be and 2) keep it from harm. That is exactly how our members feel about Eagle Creek Park. ECPF is proud of what we have been able to accomplish toward those two goals with your help and we know as we look to the future, we can approach the challenges and opportunities we face in the future with the hope that you will continue to keep Eagle Creek Park from harm and make it the best it can be.



The Eagle Creek Park Foundation receives a \$30,000 grant from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust for remodeling and technology in the new Ornithology Center

Annual Fund Drive

by Jim Weir, Executive Director

The funds to operate the foundation primarily come from monies collected from membership even though a large percentage of the membership fees are paid to Indy Parks for the purchase of park passes. The Double Eagle Golf Tournament is the only significant fund raiser put on by the foundation. As stated in the article in this newsletter, we have many challenges and opportunities if we are to fulfill our mission to make Eagle Creek Park Foundation the best it can be. Those challenges and opportunities can only be met by raising additional funds above and beyond our membership fees. For some time the Eagle Creek Park Foundation Board of Directors has discussed establishing an endowment to meet the needs of funding future projects and to ensure that projects we have already funded don't fall into disrepair due to lack of proper maintenance. Other facilities in the city such as the Natatorium and the Tennis Center are facing similar challenges as they age. We certainly would not want to see a premier facility like the Earth Discovery Center diminished in the future due to maintenance concerns. An endowment would also allow the foundation to address needs without having to mount an individual capital campaign for each and every individual need. With this newsletter you will receive a pledge form. On it, you will notice, you can indicate how you wish to participate in our An-

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Wow!!!

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www.eaglecreekpark.org

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nual Fund Drive. You may choose to make a one time donation or, if you wish, you can donate on a semi-annual, quarterly or monthly basis by check or credit card. or automatic withdrawal from your account. The foundation also has the ability to receive stock transfers and bequests. Please note also on the pledge form that you can designate what you would like your donation ear-marked to support.

In an ideal world a city park would be developed and maintained from the municipal budget, but the Indy Parks & Recreation Department is tasked with stewardship over more than 200 parks and recreation facilities. The average resident pays approximately \$47 per year for parks. That's about 12.5 cents a day to support more than 200 facilities covering nearly 11,000 acres. By comparison Cincinnati residents pay \$140 per year, Nashville - \$103 per year, Cleveland - \$88 per year and Louisville - \$49 per year. Even Fort Wayne residents pay \$58 per year. It seems obvious that our parks with their aging infrastructure cannot continue to provide the excellent experience we expect at 12.5 cents a day. It is also obvious that at a time when we are clamoring to have our property taxes reduced, a tax increase to fund parks will not be in the cards in the near future. According to information obtained at a recent Parks Board meeting, there will be less money available from tax revenue next year than this year and even less the following year as the personal property tax cap goes in place. If

Eagle Creek Park is going to continue to be the "gem" of the Indy Parks system, the funds will have to be generated outside the municipal system. These facts combined with the challenges and opportunities we face make it necessary to ask you to help us in this annual fund drive. Your donations can make a tremendous difference. If Eagle Creek Park is "your place" for whatever activity, we are asking for your support to 1) keep it from harm, and 2) make it the best it can be. Please complete the pledge form and take this opportunity to give back to the park. Thank you!

Help Us Save on Newsletter Costs

As you may have noticed over the last year, the Foundation has made some great strides toward making the website and Foundation operations more effective and cost efficient. The staff and some invaluable volunteers have, and will continue to, spend a lot of hours to accomplish this. You can do your part by adding your name to the newsletter email list. Simply send an email to newsletter@ecpfoundation.org with the subject line of "add me" and you'll be helping us save on supplies, mailing, and printing costs. If, at any time, you wish to be removed from the list, email the same address with "remove me" in the subject line. For those of you without email access, we will gladly continue to provide the newsletter as in the past.