

Franklin Township will celebrate 50th anniversary of its community park

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Franklin Township will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its community park later this month, remembering the efforts of those who created the park and keep it going.

The 50th Anniversary Planning Committee will host a reception from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, May 28, at the Franklin Township Community Center, the former Curfew Grange, located at 994 Flatwoods Road, off Route 201, and nearby Franklin Township Community Park, located at 115 Warchol Road, about two miles from Route 51. The reception will include refreshments as well as games for youths, provided by Gypsy Beatty and Jessie Ross, who are working out of the Penn State Agricultural Extension Office.

“There will be a lot of memorabilia from the original construction. The photos are awesome,” said Michele Lengvarsky, chairwoman of the Franklin Township Park and Recreation Board, who is a liason to the anniversary planning committee.

There also will be photographs of the park’s current \$1.1 million renovation project, which began last year with major work on the swimming pool that included refurbishing and enlarging the main pool and adding tot and intermediate areas that are both accessible to those with physical limitations. About 10 water-play features have been added, ranging from water sprayers to slides. A new concrete deck has been added around the pool, which is heated. This year’s work will include renovation of the bathhouse.

The township received a variety of grants that have permitted officials to do the renovations, including money from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, Fayette County Community Foundation, Fayette County Tourism Grant, state Department of Community and Economic Development, as well as funds obtained by state Sen. Richard A. Kasunic, D-Dunbar, and state Rep. Deberah Kula, D-North Union Township.

Tours of the pools will be available during the May 28 celebration. Ronnie Allen will serve as disc jockey from 2 to 6 p.m. at the pool, which will open for the season that day.

The planning committee, which is a subcommittee of the park and recreation board, includes members whose parents were on the board of Curfew Grange 1052 when the park was built in 1961. They include Cathy Brady, whose father Ralph Allen was on the board; Sandy Brittingham, whose parents Wylie and Joan Rittenhouse were on the board; Dorothy Chaikcic, whose father Lewis Mills was on the board; Jim Griffin, who was master of the grange in 1961; and community members Christine Rusinack and Stephanie Rosinski. Lengvarsky is a liaison between the park board and the planning committee.

The park board includes Patti Grimplin, Dale Rosinski and Bill Rittenhouse. Tom McCracken, chairman of the township supervisors, is a liaison to the park board.

Franklin Township took over ownership of the park in 2007, which was previously named the Curfew Recreation Center. Current supervisors are McCracken, Melvin Lerch and George Bozek.

McCracken said, "I'd like to pay a compliment to my predecessor Tim Franks. He was one of those who stood up to bat to take over the facility."

Lerch said, "It's a community thing. The residents petitioned us to take it over."

Bozek said, "I think it's a great effort then and now. The whole idea is to promote community and family."

With the renovations to the pool, membership has grown from 43 to almost 200. Officials note the park is open to everyone and that members come from all parts of Fayette County.

Operating hours for the pool, which will be open through Labor Day, are from noon to 8 p.m. daily. There also is a night swim from 8 to 11 p.m. on Fridays. There is a daily gate fee of \$8, while children ages 4 and younger are admitted free.

Memberships are available for sale at the rate of \$90 per person before opening day and \$100 per person after the opening.

"It's important to realize that it was a real community effort," said Brittingham of the founders. "They went out on a limb and a lot of people said they could never do this."

Griffin said, “Fayette Bank said they would give us \$20,000 if we would co-sign for it. We signed personal notes.”

“They really wanted the pool for the community,” said Brady.

“It’s just a unique environment — even in 2011,” said Lengvarsky, noting the park includes 25 acres with the swimming pool, six pavilions and volleyball and softball areas.

Plans are for the eventual renovation of the pavilions and ballfield, and to put in a walking trail. There is strong community support for the park. Fundraisers are being held every month and Griffin and Rittenhouse spearheaded a donation campaign that has raised \$3,000.

For more information on the pool, including weather updates, call 724-529-0318. Information on pavilion rents and membership can be obtained by calling 724-677-2272. More information is available online at facebook.com/franklintownshipcommunitypark.



Fran Zajac

Franklin Township Community Park celebrates 50th Anniversary

Members of the 50th Anniversary Planning Committee for the Franklin Township Community Park recently held a press conference with Franklin Township Board of Supervisors to announce plans for the 50th anniversary celebration of the creation of the park, which will take place on Saturday, May 28. The township conducted a major renovation of the pool last year and will continue work on the park this summer. Pictured at the pool are, from left, Patti Grimplin, Sandy Brittingham, Dorothy Chaikcic, Jim Griffin, all planning committee members; Michele Lengvarsky, chairwoman of the Franklin Township Park and Recreation Board, and Cathy Brady, also a member of the planning committee.