

Ceremony celebrates spiffed-up Den Rock Park

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LAWRENCE — When Melanie Lilly looks out the window of her Spruce Street home, all she sees are asphalt sidewalks and crowded tenement houses.

But the 14-year-old finds refuge at Den Rock Park, a place where her father, Tennis Lilly, chairman of the Conservation Commission, has long taken the family to get away from the city.

"It's a place where I can come with my dad, sit on the rock and relax," said Lilly, an eighth-grader at Arlington School. "It's a place of peace."

The Lillys, Mayor Michael J. Sullivan and others cut a red ribbon in a ceremony recently, celebrating improvements at the park.

Melanie was one of six youngsters who cleaned it up as members of the Green Team at Groundwork Lawrence. Stephany Berroa, Jennifer Pagan, Emmanuel Espaillat, Nefty Correa and Rodolfo Morel Jr. also volunteered. Groundwork Lawrence received a \$50,000 state grant and \$1,000 from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust for the project.

Den Rock Park is a 120-acre wooded preserve sandwiched between housing developments, the North Andover Mall and Route 114. It draws climbers from across New England to tackle a 30-foot-tall rock, the centerpiece of the wooded preserve.

ABOUT DEN ROCK PARK

- **The park is** a 120-acre wooded preserve with walking trails, a granite rock face with fissures for climbing, scenic overlooks and access to the Shawsheen River.
- **The land was** first bought in 1877 for a cemetery and was designated as a city park in 1896. The park is owned by Lawrence, North Andover and the Merrimack Valley Watershed Council.
- **Workers from** Civilian Conservation Corps installed rock steps, two amphitheatres, a boardwalk and several trails in the 1930s.
- **Several ideas for** Den Rock Park have been proposed over the years, including an industrial park, a road, an Elks clubhouse, a site for Raytheon, a new Lawrence library and a high school.

The teens worked for eight weeks last summer at the park's entrance on Route 114, said Maggie Super Church, executive director of Groundwork Lawrence. They cleared about a half acre of the 80-acre portion belonging to Lawrence.

Several hours a day they picked up trash, trimmed trees and marked trails named after birds sited in the area.

This is a second step in improvements by the city and Groundwork Lawrence at the site. In 2005, the parking lot was paved and a new sign installed. Church said Groundwork Lawrence hopes to clear more land deeper in the park.

After fighting to protect the park from a bulldozer to build a mall, Tennis Lilly said last week's ceremony was special for him.

"People protect what they cherish and cherish what they understand," he said.

For the teens, the project was more than just a clean-up. They went on several field trips, including to the Water Treatment Plant in North Andover, Maudslay State Park in Newburyport, Lowell National State Park and the Lawrence Experiment station.

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KEN YUSZKUS/Staff photo

Tennis Lilly, chairman of the Lawrence Conservation Commission, Lawrence Mayor Michael J. Sullivan and Melanie Lilly, Tennis' daughter, are ready to cut the ribbon during the Den Rock Park Trail improvements ceremony. Melanie was one of six young people who helped clean up the park this summer as part of the Groundwork Green Team.