

New park springs to life on old incinerator site

By Yadira Betances

ybetances@eagletribune.com

September 18, 2009 01:05 am

LAWRENCE — Angello Nunez, 10, played on the monkey bars while his father gazed at the reflection of the mills in the river from the pavilion with a rainbow-colored roof.

Angello, a student at Arlington School, and his dad, Fausto, were visiting the city's newest park, officially opened this week with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"We have something to beautify the neighborhood now," Fausto Nunez said.

Area residents said Manchester Street Park is a welcome addition to the neighborhood surrounded by textile mills, multifamily homes and businesses.

"It's going to be wonderful for the kids," said Esther Wambui, who lives on West Street. "It's far from the road, quiet, safe and it's clean."

There are two playgrounds at the site — one for 5- to 12-year-olds and another for 2- to 5-year-olds.

The park borders the Spicket River at Stevens Pond, and has an overlook to the pond with a pavilion. There is a walking trail with 80 trees lining the park, including crab apples, cherry, red maple, oak, birch and elms.

And for those with a green thumb, there is a community garden with 30 beds.

Plus Company, a program for special needs people in Lawrence, helped prepare the gardens where acorn squash, tomatoes and peppers are growing.

"It's something we wanted to do for a long time," said Jill Jolin, community integration coordinator for Plus Company.

"It's very rewarding for our folks because it teaches them patience and it's very therapeutic. This is a gem in the city because it sits behind a brick building and it's something beautiful to look at," Jolin said.

The park was built on five acres at 75 Manchester St., the site of a former incinerator on the edge of the Arlington and Tower Hill neighborhoods.

The plant closed in 1998 after 20 years of operation. Garbage was burned to generate electricity, and the company emitted 800 pounds of mercury and 400 pounds of lead annually.

Once filled with bricks, rubble, garbage and part of a smokestack, the city purchased the land for \$1 in 2007 from former owner Covanta Energy, which operates an incinerator at the Ward Hill Industrial Park in Haverhill.

Groundwork Lawrence spearheaded the effort to build the park, along with the city.

"It's not just a dream anymore," said Heather McMann, acting executive director of Groundwork Lawrence, during the ribbon-cutting Wednesday.

"It was the neighbors who said, 'We want this' 'We need this.' This is one more great way to look at growth," McMann said.

She said the park is going to change the neighborhood in several ways, including smart-growth redevelopment, a project which combines space for living, working and recreation.

Across the river is the redevelopment of the Polartec property, which will include residential and commercial space once it is completed.

"Before the park was built, there was very little green or open space in the neighborhood and many houses do not have yards for their kids to play," McMann said.

In addition to providing a place for children and families to spend time and play, the trees and open space in the park will help manage storm water and flooding issues associated with Stevens Pond and the Spicket River, McMann said.

"Parks increase surrounding property values as well as improve the local area for existing businesses and will make the area more attractive to potential new businesses," McMann said.

The site was contaminated with dioxins, arsenic, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, which were covered with 3 feet of clean soil to isolate them from park users.

McMann said total cost for the cleanup, design, and building of the park was \$1,053,100.01.

In addition to beautifying the area, the park is attracting wildlife, including blue herons and turtles.

No one is happier to see the park than Richard McCarthy and Arthur Brien. The two men grew up on Tower Hill and remember seeing black smoke billowing from the incinerator's two towers.

"It's exhilarating to see the change," said McCarthy, 79.

"It's a tremendous change to see this natural surrounding after having a highly polluted site.

"Any enhancement of green space improves the quality of life in the city and having a natural area is good for our soul and well-being."

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.

Photos



Justin Karanja, 4, who lives near the new Manchester Street Park, plays after the dedication ceremony Wednesday afternoon. An incinerator plant once sat on the site. Carl Russo/Staff photo Staff Photographer



Justin Karanja, 4, and his cousins, Eunice Mbugua, top, 8, and Jacinta Wanjiru, 7, all of Lawrence, play at the new Manchester Street Park after the dedication ceremony Wednesday afternoon. Carl Russo/Staff photo Staff Photographer



From left, Ken Nydam, business manager for Covanta, the company that donated the land for the park; Lawrence City Councilor Roger Twomey (background) James Barnes, Director of Community Development for the City of Lawrence; Lawrence City Councilor, Nicholas Kolofoles and a host of people responsible for the Manchester Street Park help cut the ribbon at the dedication ceremony Wednesday afternoon. Carl Russo/Staff photo Staff Photographer