



Canton unveils Fairhope Nature Preserve

Children skipped stones off the water. Fish were stocked in a pond. Birds chirped and fluttered amongst the trees. Ducks waddled along the water's edge.

That was the scene at the Fairhope Nature Preserve on Saturday during the grand opening of the roughly 70-acre site.

Mayor William J. Healy II; Dan Moeglin, the city's engineer; Doug Perry, director of the Canton Park System; and other officials explained the history and significance of the project.

Located along Millvale Avenue and Lesh Street NE, the nature preserve includes walking and biking trails, fishing and spots to enjoy nature. The property includes a retention basin and a settling basin, created as part of a drainage project in the 30th Street NE area.

Moeglin said the project provides passive recreation and improves water quality downstream in conjunction with the flood control project, which ties in with Fairhope Stream.

Roughly 1 1/2 miles of trails are accessible to the public, including portions covered with gravel and others that are dirt paths. More trail work is planned. The goal is to eventually connect the Fairhope preserve to bike trails in the county park system, Moeglin said.

The retention basin was stocked Saturday with young fish, including bluegill, catfish, perch, shellcracker and bass. The basin was also stocked with the same type of fish about two years ago.

TRANQUIL SITE

Gary and Denise Babos, of Louisville, said they both plan to visit the nature preserve frequently to hike.

Denise Babos grew up in the Fletcher Avenue NE area near the preserve site. "You feel like you're 1,000 miles from home, and you're 10 minutes from home," she said of the preserve's tranquility.

Preserve wildlife includes wild turkeys, deer, red-winged blackbirds, red-tailed hawks, geese and other types of birds, said Perry, the city's park director.

John Cummins, president of Johnny O's Landscaping, expressed enthusiasm for the project. Cummins, one of the contractors on the project, attended the dedication event with his 10-year-old daughter, Carli, who painted a miniature birdhouse, one of the activities for children at the event.

"I just love it," Cummins said of the preserve. "Being part of developing another park in the city is just incredible."

FUTURE PLANS

In the future, the city would like to construct a shelter and bathrooms at the preserve, as well as a fishing pier at the site's natural pond, Moeglin said. Those projects are contingent on securing grant funding, he said.

Students at St. Peter School, with assistance from Lynda Tuttle's Art Center, made the plaques that provide information on wildlife at the preserve.

Boy Scouts of America Troop 16 also helped with the preserve project. The Timken Co. previously donated and planted more than 100 trees, Moeglin said.

The \$3.4 million Fairhope preserve project, includes \$1.5 million in drainage and flood control work. Grant funding totaled about \$2.6 million, Moeglin said. City capital improvement funding and donations both helped support the project.

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"It's going to be great for the neighborhood, kids and adults," City Councilman David Dougherty, D-6, said of the preserve. "We're always looking for something to do, where families can go and enjoy themselves in the city."