

Unplugged Learning plans Countryside Park renovations with support of Kaestle Boos, KBE

Community gathering spaces are increasingly vital for the harmonious life of any community.

Perhaps the most photographed of these spaces in Avon is Countryside Park, notable for its distinctive covered bridge situated on a dam with a melodious, tiered waterfall. Hawley Brook is also photogenic as it meanders into the upper pond from its journey through 275 acres of forest across Huckleberry Hill Road, channeling pristine water into the pond.

At any time of year, the park's main building, with stone fireplace, picture windows and kitchen, is rented to a wide variety of families, clubs for young and old, learning or religious organizations. According to Glenn Marston, director of parks and recreation, it is "a busy and well-used facility, where people of all ages find enjoyment, but it needs more maintenance than is covered by the fees. We are fortunate that some citizens, groups and businesses are stepping up to the plate to help us with this. We have a history of support for our parks. The Lions Club donated the covered bridge, for example."

The Unplugged Learning Proj-

ect, directed by Susan Rietano-Davey, is one of these groups. She lives nearby on Edwards Road with her husband, Bob, and they have four children who have made extensive use of the park over the years.

"They use it for all of the things that children and teenagers are supposed to do in the great outdoors, when they tear themselves away from their often overly structured lives and myriad pervasive distractions. The same is true for parents. Once intimately tied to the places of childhood, we are now disconnected from the land and from each other in important ways. This park helps us to reconnect."

The idea of focusing on renovating the park, and bringing it under the purveyance of Unplugged Learning came from Rick Walker of New Road, who was born and raised across the street from the park, where his grandfather had a farm. His grandfather also helped to maintain the park when it was a reservoir for drinking water.

"I would bike ride or hike through the park, and the place started looking a bit seedy, so I talked to Glenn" said Walker, a writing professor, college prep ad-

viser and owner of Emanations Press. "I had also experienced for many years the power of volunteerism for charitable building renovations through our Church of St. Ann group, now in its 15th year. Glenn and I and Bruce Williams, head of public works, met and discussed some contacts."

The first major contact, Kaestle Boos, donated proposed architectural plans for both building and grounds. Then, KBE Building Corporation, a local firm, formerly Konover Construction Corporation, donated \$1,500 and four new exterior doors with hardware to kick off the project.

"We are excited to help Unplugged Learning and Avon with this project that serves to reinforce community spirit for all, and focus more on ways to engage our youths in the appreciation of nature," said Simon Etzel, KBE senior vice president. "Hopefully, through this contribution, town residents will be encouraged to contribute funds and time for this beautiful park project."

"Now we're planning for a one-day gathering of volunteers, on a Saturday in May, to do the bulk of the work," said Walker. "We're in fundraising mode into March and need volunteers for this and for the work, which encompasses some 50 different items. Professionals are used in some areas, and the town, of course, can help out within its ongoing purveyance which makes this a doable initiative."

While the list is a work in progress, it encompasses such items as: roof shingle replacement, demolition of the now unnecessary entry ramp and perhaps construction of an entry canopy, a few more new doors and some new windows, attic insulation, hardwood floor refinishing, new interior light fixtures, new parking lot lights, drainage/cleaning of the lower pond, and work on the scenic trails including a wetlands observation area.

See photo galleries on these sites for the five donated plans/image sets by Kaestle Boos Architects.

www.unpluggedlearning.org

<http://home.comcast.net/~walkerr12/site/?/home>

Not everything in the plans will be accepted and/or completed, and some aspects need explanation. New funds from the town are not being sought for this project to take place, unless the Recreation and Park Department decides to do so. This park does bring in revenue so that it is largely self-sustaining, and could be more so after the renovation. Volunteer sign up sheets for May 15 & pledge cards are available

at the Department or by e-mail to:

Glenn Marston: gmarston@town.avon.ct.us or

Rick Walker at college_prep@comcast.net

Or call Glenn at 860-409-4332. Checks may also be mailed without the card to Town of Avon, Recreation and Park Dept., 60 West Main St., Avon, 06001. Specify on the check the use of the gift for Countryside Park.