2010 Awards and Scholarships

The annual Gadget of the Year award!

Evie Kirkwood thanks the student volunteers for their service at the 2010 GLPTI. (Pictured above are Assistant Director Jules Erwin, Shanna Saubert, Teal Betz, Iain Mason, Paula Bell, Abby Dean, and George Tardy, Jr.)
Terry Coleman and Steve Wolter pose with Bruce Hronek (middle), a Lawson Award winner.

Terry Coleman, Richard Sobecki, and Steve Wolter. Richard Sobecki is a 2010 Lawson Award winner.
Steve Wolter honors Terry Coleman, outgoing GLPTI Chair, for his service to the Institute.

Javaughn Fernanders of St. Joseph County Parks was the 2010 Scholarship winner.
Terry Coleman, Steve Wolter, and Alan Buckenmeyer are on hand to congratulate Alice Eastman. Her submission, the Hidden Oaks Nature Center, won a Flaherty Award for Park Excellence.

Terry Coleman, Jerry Pagac, Steve Wolter, and Alan Buckenmeyer. Jerry Pagac’s park district, the Champaign Country Forest Preserve District, won a Flaherty Award for Park Excellence for their Possibility Pier.
In 2005, Bolingbrook Park District created a separate division dedicated to natural resources and environmental education. This new department places emphasis on passive recreation, natural areas management, and sustainability, rather than active recreation.

Every three years, the Bolingbrook Park District sends out a community wide survey to randomly selected households. In 2007, the responses that ranked highest were all related to the environment: 99% support recycling in the recreation centers and parks; 87% support the initiative to improve natural areas and to increase environmental education programming; and 73% support a paperless initiative to the extent legally possible.

When the Natural Resources Division was created, it carried with it the objectives of providing environmental education programming for school groups, youth and Scout groups, community groups, and families; providing public information via our website, publications and a speaker’s bureau; and land management protocols for habitat improvement and increasing biodiversity in our natural areas. These objectives enhance the Park District’s mission of acquiring and maintaining parks, facilities, and natural areas for current and future generations to enjoy and fostering public awareness of, and support for the benefits of quality leisure opportunities and conservation of natural resources.

But Bolingbrook needed a home for all of these activities.

In 2007, the District purchased a three-acre property, worked with the Village of Bolingbrook to lease a twenty-seven acre woodland, purchased the 17 ½ acre nature center site, and added the existing Hidden Lakes Trout Farm and a portion of the DuPage River Greenway to create nearly 80 acres of adjacent open space “consolidated” into the Hidden Oaks Conservation Area. This parcel is made up of oak savanna, maple bluff woods, lowland cottonwood woods, DuPage River and trail system, a set of four fishing lakes, wetlands, and Eurasian grassland. This area has a master plan to include a picnic shelter, toilet facilities, permeable parking, and interpretive trails with outdoor classrooms. Hidden Oaks Nature Center sits at the heart of it all.
Bolingbrook Park District made the conscious decision to pursue Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification at the highest level: Platinum. LEED is a voluntary, national green building rating system created by the United States Green Buildings Council (USGBC). LEED guides the development of high-performance, sustainable buildings by emphasizing state-of-the-art strategies in six areas: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials and resources selection, indoor environmental quality and innovation in design.

Four categories of building certification are earned on a point system with a maximum of 69 points: a Certified project must earn more than 26 points; Silver, 33; Gold, 39; and the highest level Platinum, 52 points. There are 126 LEED Platinum certified buildings currently listed on the nationwide USGBC registry online.

Bolingbrook Park District is proud to announce Hidden Oaks Nature Center attempted 56 points and has received 55, earning Platinum status.

Hidden Oaks Nature Center sits at the center of Hidden Oaks Conservation Area, an 80 acre grouping of open space parcels at the northern end of Schmidt Road. The area includes a portion of the DuPage River Greenway, Hidden Lakes Trout Farm, Hidden Oaks Nature Center and the 27 acre James S. Boan Woods. Future development of the Conservation Area includes a picnic pavilion, restroom facilities, parking, outdoor classrooms, and nature trails.

The building is placed on the site on an east-west axis to take advantage of the southern exposure to daylight for a majority of the public classrooms and office space. More than 90% of the spaces in the building are lit by natural daylight. Rooms also include occupancy sensors to turn lights on and off as the rooms are used; these can be manually overridden. The overall design incorporates permeable pavers and rain gardens to reduce stormwater runoff; a vegetated roof to clean the air, reduce heat island effect, provide insulation for the building, and habitat for birds and insects; photovoltaics to generate up to 13% of the building’s electrical requirements; reduction of energy use by 58% through structural insulating panels for an improved thermal envelope; a geo-exchange heating and air conditioning system to harness the earth’s constant temperature and reduce the energy needed to heat and cool the building; recycled interior finishes such as Paperstone®, ceramic tiles and carpeting; Low-flow fixtures and constructed wetland which processes waste water combine to reduce water usage by 48% and keeps the building “off the grid;” low VOC paints and sealants to keep harmful vapors out of the air, and support timbers from oak trees that had to be removed from the site to make way for the building. All of these components were carefully chosen for their sustainability.

Bolingbrook Park District received more than $3,400,000 in grant funding for land acquisition, nature center design and construction, installation of photovoltaic panels and the green roof, all from a wide variety of state and federal sources.

The process continues at Hidden Oaks Nature Center with creative interpretive learning experiences which awaken a sense of wonder and encourage responsible environmental behavior. Interpretive programming includes youth, youth group, family and adult programs to encourage stewardship and living more lightly on the planet.

Seedlings Preschool finds its home at Hidden Oaks Nature Center. While the room may not look “green,” the materials and finishes in this room are reflective of the interiors in the rest of the building. The furniture is rapidly renewable, as is the cork on the walls, the tile on the floors and the cabinetry. The paint is low VOC like the adhesives used to stick the cork to the walls and the tiles to the floors. It’s beautiful, functional, and green.

By immersing children in the outdoors at such an early age, we hope to begin the process of reversing Nature Deficit Disorder and creating students who truly care about the world around them. Outdoor spaces lend themselves to free play in nature; big sticks to pile or build shelters, blocks, trees to climb, music, balancing on logs and jumping from boulder to boulder, digging in the dirt and discovering treasures, and open space to run. Members of the Bolingbrook Garden Club are designing a garden for the center. Square foot gardening will incorporate many different types of...
gardens in one accessible location: sensory, organic produce, native prairie, heirloom apples, a sunflower house, and areas specifically for the preschoolers to tend.

Hidden Oaks Nature Center used Blue Sky thinking and turned a building process from green to Platinum.

Possibility Pier
Possibility Pier: Fishing Access for All

The Genesis of the Project

In 2008, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) joined with the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois, and Champaign and Urbana Park Districts, in a collaborative grant application to the Kellogg Foundation’s Access to Recreation Grant Program. The Access to Recreation Grants are intended to spur communities and agencies to provide greater access to a wide variety of recreation opportunities, to develop innovative accessible design solutions and to further the spread of universal design as a goal for all accessible facilities.

Prior to grant application, we formed an advisory committee and held a series of planning meetings, discussing the scope and character of the project, including specific design details. The above-mentioned provider agencies are the financial beneficiaries of the grant. The other key members of our Advisory Committee – the service agencies - are the beneficiaries of the finished project – the people for whom the project was constructed. These key participants are Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation (CUSR), the Swann Special Care Center, the Developmental Services Center, the Champaign County Developmental Disabilities Board, People Assuming Control of their Environment (PACE), the Greater Champaign County chapter of AMBUCS, and the University of Illinois’ Disability Resources and Educational Services Center (see appendix for further information about these agencies).

Concept Development

The CCFPD chose to construct a state-of-the-art, universally accessible fishing pier at Sunset Lake, in the River Bend Forest Preserve in Mahomet, Illinois. We wanted to provide an unusual and special recreation opportunity for physically-challenged individuals that would be regional in scope, and that would go beyond the currently accepted standard for accessibility. Possibility Pier, at 220 feet in length and 1752 square feet, is the only facility of this type and scale in Champaign County and surrounding areas.

Sunset Lake is particularly beautiful because of its large size (100+ acres) and the remarkable clarity and depth of its water – it is up to 50 feet deep in places. It has excellent fishing. However, the banks of Sunset Lake are relatively steep, and are not accommodating to bank fishing. Possibility Pier provides an opportunity for physically-challenged persons to travel out onto the lake to fish, and to experience its beauty from a different perspective. It is a wonderful place to escape the heat on a hot summer’s day, out on the water, on a shaded platform to the breezes.

Sunset Lake at River Bend Forest Preserve
Our dream for this project was to provide a fishing pier and eventually a ‘trail on the water’ that was more than just accessible, that would attempt to accommodate the wants and possibilities of physically-challenged persons, as well as their needs. We wanted to go beyond the minimum standard to develop a facility that would provide a very special experience for everyone, because of its accessibility as well as its unique character, location and size.

Project Design

In addition to universal accessibility, we wanted the pier to function as an exciting site for environmental education. For this purpose we needed an area large enough for classes. We oriented the primary axis of the pier parallel to the shoreline, providing visual and fishing access both to open water on the east, and shoreline and wildlife on the west, adding to the variety of aquatic experiences for visitors.

In order to be completely comfortable for those in wheelchairs, and those with compromised balance, the pier had to be extremely stable – it had to come as close to solid ground in feeling as possible. We achieved that goal through the use of extra flotation under the pier. In addition to that most crucial design feature, we included all of the expected minimal access features such as a transition plate and extended grab bar at the gangway entrance, and a minimal gangway slope. The site has accessible restrooms, parking and sidewalks to the pier.

Prior to submitting the grant application, the Advisory Committee held a series of meetings in order to define the parameters of the project. A key topic of discussion was development of different accessible design features, in an effort to provide the best possible experience for our users. We were fortunate to have the hands-on expertise of the service agencies in this process. We actually were able to present our design ideas to some of their clients for feedback. The key design criteria were prioritized as follows:

1. The pier should be extremely stable.
2. Universal accessibility; that is, the entire structure is accessible, rather than just parts of it being set aside for those with physical limitations.

Note accessible tackle box table and gap in railing for ease in fishing from a wheelchair.
3. Some shade should be provided for the elderly and/or those who may be sensitive to heat.
4. At least one platform should be large enough for larger groups and classes.
5. A railing system is necessary on the perimeter of the entire pier, both for actual safety as well as the perception of safety. “You will feel a whole lot more comfortable on a floating pier if you know that you can’t fall off, even if it is stable.”
6. The railing system should be a maximum of 34” in height to allow wheelchair users to see over it.
7. The pier should feature “fishing stations” which consist of a tackle box table, a bench, and specially-designed gaps in the railing to allow wheelchair anglers to cast and then lower their fishing poles below the level of the railing if they so choose. In this way they can fish ‘through’ the rail rather than over it.
8. Railings should have a nine-inch opening between the bottom rail and the deck, to allow foot room for wheelchair users. The deck itself should extend one foot beyond the rail on all platform areas for wheelchair safety.
9. All walkways, including the gangway, should be a minimum of five feet in width.

In addition to developing a facility that would try to move beyond the basic standard in accessibility, we wanted to move beyond the norm in creation of a wonderful place for people to be on the water. It was our intention to create a linear fishing pier that could eventually be connected to the shore on the far end, thus functioning as a “trail on the water” rather than just a fishing platform. Our “trail” has different stopovers, or rest sites. It has three separate platforms, each with its own special character. The first and second platforms are in full sun, while the third has a shade structure covering it entirely, and features a picnic table as well as benches and tackle box tables. The first platform is close to shore. The second platform faces both inward and outward – toward the shoreline and away from it. The third platform is really out on the water. You feel like you are sitting right in the middle of the cove, effectively surrounded by water.
Possibility Pier
Champaign County Forest Preserve District

This linear fishing pier with its series of platforms also provides a variety of environmental education opportunities that are not currently available. On the shore side of the pier, students will have the opportunity to view transition aquatic species, such as frogs, minnows and dragonflies, as well as the occasional larger fish trolling through the shallower water. On the lake side of the pier, students will be able to see a variety of aquatic birds, and fish jumping in the lake. We have attached artificial aquatic “weeds” to the underside of the pier to attract fish. Specially constructed fish cribs, along with discarded Christmas trees were strategically sunk to the bottom adjacent to the platforms, again to encourage fish to the vicinity of the anglers.

Our Environmental Education Department has already taken advantage of this new educational opportunity. We are looking forward to a special “Accessible Fishing” class at Possibility Pier next summer.

Saturday, August 7, 2010

ACCESSIBLE FISHING AT POSSIBILITY PIER

Possibility Pier, River Bend Forest Preserve, 1602 Mid-America Rd., Mahomet, 8:00 A.M. -11:00 A.M. Persons with disabilities and their families are encouraged to experience our wheelchair-accessible, ADA-compliant pier with a morning of free fishing fun, and more! All ages and skill levels are welcome. The Illinois fishing license requirement will be waived for this event. Bait will be provided, and fishing poles are available to borrow, but you are welcome to bring your own. Free Registration is required, as space is limited; (217) 896-2455.

The pier has become a popular place for fishing.
Possibility Pier
Champaign County Forest Preserve District

Project Affordability
The CCFPD was able to complete this exciting project at a reasonable cost, due to the money received through the very competitive Access to Recreation Grant. Our cooperative financial agreement with three other key community agencies, combined with the significant and integral involvement of the community agencies whose clients will benefit from the project, was key to our successful grant application.

The total cost for Possibility Pier was $195,000. Of that cost, we received $111,333 in grant funds from the Access to Recreation program, which is almost 60% of the total project cost.

Possibility Pier Extension
We already have plans to extend the pier another 200 feet, connecting it up to the shoreline farther into the cove. Once it is reconnected to the shore, the trail will ascend the bank to the parking lot, and will connect with the existing multi-use trail that parallels the north side of the lake.

Benefits of the Project
We worked closely with a number of local service provider agencies in our design development process, meeting with clients as well as special care staff, in an unusually interactive, community-driven design process. As a result, we now have a beautiful, state-of-the-art fishing pier that goes beyond basic accessibility in an effort to achieve the ultimate experience for all users. There is no other fishing pier of this scale and complexity in East Central Illinois, while Sunset Lake, as the largest body of water in the area, provides a superlative location for the facility. Possibility Pier also provides an exciting opportunity for environmental education at the Forest Preserve, with its unusual access to mid-lake open water as well as shoreline aquatic habitat.

As our community welcomes our returning war veterans with their physical and emotional scars, the importance of a facility of this type comes into sharper focus. What better way is there to aid in healing the wounds of war than a day on the water fishing, in the middle of a beautiful lake, surrounded by the woods and fields of home?
List and Mission of Service Agencies on the Advisory Committee:

Champaign-Urbana Special Recreation (CUSR) was formed through a cooperative agreement with the Champaign and Urbana Park Districts to provide recreation programs and leisure services for residents with disabilities. Inclusion and specialized programs are available. It provides quality recreation programs for people with disabilities by hiring and training qualified staff, providing staff ratios which ensure program safety and success, and adapting programs and equipment to meet the needs of the participants.

Community Foundation of East Central Illinois was established in 1972 to encourage and receive contributions establishing endowments for the long-term benefit of East Central Illinois. The Community Foundation does not conduct programs of its own, nor is it a fund-raising organization. The Community Foundation supports and serves its donors by managing and administering endowed funds that have been donated for philanthropic purposes. It also serves its multi-county area by collaborating with other organizations to improve the quality of life for the residents of East Central Illinois.

Swann Special Care Center in Champaign is a home for children who are severely multiply handicapped. The staff consists of skilled professionals, paraprofessionals and trained nursing assistants who, with other support staff, provide a caring atmosphere in which the children’s physical, medical, nutritional, mental, emotional, and social needs are met.

Developmental Services Center (DSC) is a non-profit organization serving developmentally disabled individuals in Champaign and Ford Counties. The mission of the DSC is to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities by providing services and supports which enable them to live, work, learn and participate in their communities. DSC was formed in 1972 by the merger of four community organizations. The result is a comprehensive organization that is able to provide multiple services in the two-county area. The two counties served are diverse: Champaign County, with an urban/rural population of 179,643, is the home to the University of Illinois and several large businesses, while Ford County, made up of several small, rural communities, has a total population of 14,241. DSC serves between 800 and 1,000 individuals (consumers) annually. DSC serves individuals who may have epilepsy, cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome, mental retardation and/or other disabling conditions. It is through the programs and services offered at DSC that these individuals are able to pursue a more fulfilling life.

The Champaign County Developmental Disabilities Board is the local developmental disabilities authority for Champaign County. The CCDDB is responsible for planning, coordinating, evaluation and allocating funds (a component of the property taxes for Champaign County) for the comprehensive local system of developmental disabilities services for Champaign County. The mission of the CCDDB is the promotion of a local system of services for the treatment of developmental disorders in accordance with the assessed priorities of the citizens of Champaign County.

People Assuming Control of their Environment (PACE) serves people who have disabilities or disability-related concerns. PACE provides advocacy, independent living counseling, peer counseling, information and referral, skills training, and specific services, such as sign language interpreter referral, Brailing and services to people over age 55 with visual impairments, personal assistance
referral, free equipment loan program, and speakers bureau. PACE’s Equipment Loan Closet has a number of items available for short-term use. The Community Reintegration Program assists people ages 18-59 with moving from a nursing home back into the community. PACE has a new program specifically developed to assist persons in Champaign County with developmental disabilities in moving toward independent living with supports. PACE’s Homeownership Coalition assists in consumer education and locating funds for homeownership.

The Greater Champaign County chapter of AMBUCS provides wheelchair ramps to citizens of Champaign County who meet certain financial qualifications. The group also provides scholarships for physical therapy and related fields to second-year students at Parkland College, sponsors national scholarship requests to the national AMBUCS, works with the Urbana Park District in enhancing AMBUCS Park in Urbana and works with C-U Special Recreation programs for children with disabilities. AMBUCS has constructed two pavilions and one smaller shelter, as well as a gazebo and various accessible playscape items. AMBUCS also assists with the placement of AmTrykes all around the county. They have two demo sites, one in the Urbana Schools and one in the Wisconsin Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee.

The mission of the University of Illinois’ Disability Resources and Educational Services is to ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the curricular, co-curricular and vocational opportunities available at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign through the collaborative promotion, provision and/or pursuit of innovative accommodative and educational services, and interdisciplinary disability research.