

## Park makeover set to be done by spring

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middletown

Rainy weather has delayed progress on a \$1.3 million renovation to a township park, but much of the work has been completed.

Extreme Makeover, Park Edition is going fairly well in Middletown, but it's not time to move that bus.

Township Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna said most of the major elements in a \$1.3 million renovation to Lance Corporal Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park have been completed. However, re-growing grass and putting in shrubs and other landscaping can't be done until warmer weather, so the park won't reopen until sometime in the spring, she added. It has been closed for several months.

Crews from DePaul and Co. Inc. have completed a new restroom, two new lighted basketball courts and two new lighted tennis courts at the park on Brownsville Road near Old Lincoln Highway. Work is also well along on paved walking trails, an expanded parking lot and other features, said Lamanna.

Much of the paving will be pervious material that will allow water to soak through and reduce runoff at the park, she added.

"I'm still hoping the trails, parking lot and all the other actual construction elements can be finished by the end of this year," said Lamanna. "But we have to put in a lot of new grass and landscaping and you can't get that really going until the spring. There is no point letting people back in to walk around on mud."

Some nearby residents had no complaints about the construction, but were anxious for the park to reopen.

"Those people are doing an excellent job," said Frank Sweeney. "They even clean up the streets near the park when their construction vehicles go through."

Denis Lynch and his daughter, Heather Glass, who lives next to the park, can't wait to use it again.

"I loved walking the dogs and taking my grandchildren [Glass' three daughters] over there to play," said Lynch. "It seems to be taking forever, but I don't know all the details of what holds things up. We made great use of the park before and will do it again when it reopens."

Lamanna said she wishes work was progressing faster, but weather has been the main delay.

"It was a wet summer and fall," she said. "Now, when we get a heavy rain, things can be held up for days afterward because we don't have the hot summer sun anymore to dry the ground up quicker. The heavy equipment will just tear things up or sink into the ground if they try to do work too soon after a rain."

The project is being funded through a \$10 million bond issue approved by the township supervisors in 2008.

The township also plans a \$1.3 million renovation of Beechwood Park on Maple Avenue that will be funded by the 2008 bond issue and, they hope, from a pending \$250,000 grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

"We hope to have the Beechwood project completed by the end of 2010, but aren't sure because we can't start until we hear about the grant," said Lamanna.

Simmons Park was formerly Veterans Park before it was renamed in honor of a Middletown veteran who was killed in the Vietnam War. Lamanna and other parks and recreation officials are planning a grand opening ceremony there for sometime around Memorial Day, but the park should be open before that, she said.

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