

Park renovation planned for summer

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Beechwood will be renamed Detective Christopher Jones Memorial Park in honor of the township police officer killed in a traffic accident last year.

Middletown resident Janet Brown enjoys walking her dog at the township's Beechwood Park next door to her home, but it's a pleasure she'll have to put on hold through the summer and fall.

Township Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna said she hopes a \$1.3 million renovation to the park at West Maple and Beechwood avenues can start in late June or July. Beechwood will be closed during the work, which hopefully will be finished by the end of the year, said Lamanna.

Improvements will include reconstructing and relocating the baseball/softball field, installing paved trails to connect the park with nearby neighborhoods, constructing a gazebo surrounded by a native plant garden, pulling out dead trees and planting new ones, expanding the parking lot and improving drainage.

"It sounds nice," said Brown. "It will be good to see them do something more with that park."

When the 15-acre park reopens, it will be renamed Detective Christopher Jones Memorial Park in honor of the Middletown police officer killed in January 2009 while making a traffic stop. Jones was a patrol officer at the time but had met all the requirements for detective and was promoted posthumously.

As plans for Beechwood move ahead, the township is finishing a \$1.3 million facelift at Lance Cpl. Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park on Brownsville Road.

Work there is nearly complete, and includes two new full basketball courts, two new tennis courts, paved walking paths, a new drainage system and an expanded parking lot. The basketball and tennis courts are lighted.

Lamanna said workers need a decent stretch of fairly dry weather to do some landscaping and other finishing touches, but she hope at least some of the park will reopen this month.

Both projects are being funded mostly from a \$10 million bond issue approved by supervisors in 2008. The township received a \$180,000 grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to help with expenses at Beechwood.

Township recreation programs coordinator Paul Kopera said the trails at Beechwood will help connect adjacent neighborhoods with the park and also the neighborhoods with each other.

"When I first looked at the plan, that was one of the parts that really engaged me," he said. "It will help residents near there get to the park and to each other's houses by foot or bike without having to get on busy streets."

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