

Park has something for everyone

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Part of the \$1.2 million park renovation included removing all invasive plants and replacing them with native species.

Joe Botzer gazed out over the new lighted tennis courts at Lance Cpl. Harry J. Simmons Jr. Memorial Park in Middletown and couldn't wait to break out his racket.

"This is great," said the township resident, who lives about a block from the park on Brownsville Road. "I love to play, and there are hardly any lighted courts in the whole county. Even a lot of unlighted ones you go to are cracked and not in very good shape. This is exciting. Once the word gets out about these, they will be very popular."

The tennis courts and two new lighted full basketball courts are available until 10 p.m. every day. They are just some of the new elements at the park, which reopened about two weeks ago after a \$1.2 million renovation that took several months.

There are two new playgrounds, a paved walking trail around the entire 10-acre park, a new softball field, restrooms (there were none before), a new 50-space parking lot (that's 30 additional spaces) and new landscaping and grass throughout the park.

A multipurpose court next to the tennis courts can be used for tennis, roller hockey and other sports.

"I haven't seen a park this nice in a long time," said Botzer. "It looks like a great place for families."

While most of the park is usable, some parts are off limits because the grass is still getting established, said township Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna. While people can play pickup games on the softball field, the township won't issue any permits for organized league play on the field until next spring, she said.

Lamanna said she's especially proud of all the eco-friendly elements that have been incorporated into the new park.

Half the new parking lot is made with a porous pavement that allows much of the rain water to soak through and trickle into the soil, rather than running off into streams and rivers. Half the lot was done this way because that's the half that the water flows to, said Lamanna. The basketball courts are also made of porous pavement.

The men's room has waterless urinals to conserve that resource, and all the invasive plants have been removed and replaced with native plants that are hardier and require less maintenance, said Lamanna.

"There were 212 native trees planted," she said.

Before the renovation, the township supervisors adopted principles from a state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources publication called "Sustainable Parks," said Lamanna.

"They are now the guiding principles for the way parks in Middletown will be built and maintained," she said. "We want not only great recreational facilities, but also the best facilities we can get in terms of sustainability and green principles."

Money for the renovation came from a \$10 million bond issue approved by the township supervisors in 2008.

The park was formerly called Veterans Park, but was recently renamed in honor of Simmons, a Middletown resident killed in the Vietnam War in 1967.

An official grand reopening celebration is scheduled for 3 p.m. June 13. Supervisors Chairman Tom Gallagher and other local officials will speak. There will be music from Our Lady of Grace Children's Choir. And members of the Jesse W. Soby American Legion Post of Langhorne will conduct a ceremony to rededicate the memorial to Simmons.

Rita's Water Ice in Penndel will provide refreshments, and representatives from K.E. Seifert Inc. will hand out free commemorative Frisbees as mementos of the day. The rain date is 6 p.m. June 14.

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"Park has something for everyone" Bucks County Courier Times 28 May 2010: B1