

FALL 2014

TEXAS

Recreation & Park Society Magazine

RECREATE A SUPERVISOR

The
Art of
Wylie Parks

Baytown's
Wetlands Center
Promotes Environmental
Stewardship

2015 TRAPS
INSTITUTE &
EXPO PREVIEW



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about this issue

We made it through the summer, and now it's time for fall! Fall is the beginning of a new fiscal year for many agencies, as President Jim Browne notes in his President's Message — a good time to talk to your fellow professionals about the value of TRAPS membership. Spread the word about our Society!

The fall issue of *TRAPS Magazine* also includes our sneak preview of the 2015 Institute & Expo, to be held in Abilene March 2-6, 2015. Get the rundown of everything you need to know beginning on page 21. The theme this year is Soaring to New Heights, and we look forward to you soaring with us in Abilene!

We spend a lot of time thinking about recreation — that is, leisure activities — in our industry, but most of us probably spend less time than we should on the other recreation — that is, the act of creating something anew. In this issue, Warren Bird from the Garland Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department discusses how managers can recreate themselves to be better leaders for their employees. Check out how you can recreate yourself on page 18.

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The Art of Wylie Parks

Public Artwork Invites Community to Come Out and Play

by JUDY TRUESDELL

Competitors approaching the baseball complex in Wylie's Community Park are greeted by the larger-than-life *Batterpillar* and *Octopitcher* — sculptures representing baseball's age-old battle between the pitcher and batter, but with a twist.

At nearby Founders Park, a 6-foot dolomitic limestone figure stands ready to toss a ball to his counterpart, who's ready to make the *Catch*.

And in Olde City Park, the gateway to the historic downtown area, a vibrant 60-foot mural incorporates Wylie history and current culture with hidden tributes to the city's 125th anniversary, including onions, one crop for which Wylie was once famous.

The city of Wylie has dedicated 1 percent of its Capital Improvement Project (CIP) fees to a public arts program since 2006. The funds are used to create artwork that enhances citizens' experiences at municipal facilities, including not only the library and City Hall but also park and recreation destinations. With almost 600 acres of city parkland, including city parks, public parks, park area dedication, open space and preserves, the city is committed to making these common areas appealing — and in Wylie, that includes art.

How Did It Happen?

It began with the City Council's commitment to the public art program, demonstrated by the passing of an ordinance dedicating the CIP funds. The Public Arts Advisory Board (PAAB) was created, made up of members of the community. City Secretary Carole Ehrlich was appointed as staff liaison to the arts board, and Sharon Corgan Leeber, an art consultant with experience in this unique type of process, was brought on board to get the ball rolling.

The PAAB determined the location and budget for each piece, and input was solicited from stakeholders, such as the park and recreation personnel. The board then issued an open call to artists, and a selection committee, made up of art board members, citizens, consultants,

artists and city staff members, narrowed the list of artists to two or three semifinalists per project. The public was invited to view their presentations, which often included scale models of their designs, and give input into what they'd like to see their tax dollars fund. The City Council then issued final approval.

Up Your Game: *Batterpillar* vs. *Octopitcher*

At a cost of \$30,000, the multilegged foes at Community Park — a 10-foot caterpillar, holding five bats, and a 9-foot Octopitcher, holding seven baseballs in his tentacles





— were created by artist Johnny Edwards following the park board’s choice of baseball as the theme of the piece. It was suggested that the art be lighthearted but also interactive and durable — suitable for climbing.

“Artist Johnny Edwards was unanimously chosen for Community Park because of his creativity in design, sustainability of workmanship and the interactive nature of these animated characters,” said Kathy Spillyards, mayor *pro tem* when the piece was dedicated in 2012. “*Up Your Game: Octopitcher vs. Batterpillar* is a unique sculpture that creates an imaginary game for children.”

The figures have a carved-wood look, but they’re actually fashioned out of cement placed on steel armatures. “Although the design and concepts are whimsical, the execution and mastery of materials give the subjects respect and a level of class,” Edwards said.

Catch

Ehrlich said that shareholders wanted a piece for Founders, Wylie’s premier park, that was playful, interactive and reflective of the activities that would take place there. Situated in the central plaza of Founders Park, the ball-playing pair welcomes the community to the gathering place.

Catch was created by Madeline Wiener, who said she never produces work that doesn’t “come from a special place” in her heart. “We have all played catch with some kind of ball or another — a whiffle ball, softball, football ... we’ve all thrown or caught a ball at some time in life.”

The limestone used in *Catch* was shipped from Lake Huron, Ontario, and was chosen

because it’s impervious to wind and because “the stone is from the earth,” Wiener said. The piece, which cost \$40,000, was unveiled in 2011 when the park reopened after \$4.5 million worth of improvements, including picnic pavilions, hike and bike trails, sand volleyball courts, a basketball court, four lighted softball fields, nine lighted multipurpose/ soccer fields, eight lighted tennis courts, and two concessions stands with restrooms. Instead of a traditional ribbon-cutting, city officials faced off with the kids who would be playing at Founders Park and tossed balls to them — inviting them to *Catch*.

Following the dedication, Wiener stayed to present an art lesson to the youngsters. She also gave them a keepsake limestone chip that had originally been part of the sculpture.

“Artist **Johnny Edwards** was unanimously chosen for Community Park because of his creativity in design, sustainability of workmanship and the interactive nature of these **animated characters.**”

— KATHY SPILLYARDS



1 Wylie’s 125th anniversary was commemorated by the painting of *Wide-Awake Wylie*, a 10-foot-by-60-foot mural in Olde City Park that included historical icons and figures as well as modern-day leaders and landmarks. **2** Madeline Wiener’s sculpture, *Catch*, is located in the central plaza of Wylie’s Founders Park, capturing the simple but pleasurable act of throwing and catching a ball. **3** When *Catch* was unveiled at Wylie’s Founders Park, city officials faced off with the kids who would be using the park, tossing a ball instead of cutting a ribbon. **4** The two 6-foot figures, made of dolomitic limestone, are lowered into their Founders Park location by cranes. **5** Mayor Eric Hogue stands amid the tentacles of the *Octopitcher*, one of the playful sculptures at Wylie’s Community Park.



Parks and Recreation and Art Advisory boards felt was needed for the projects.”

“Children love interacting with the art, and its uniqueness draws them in. The artists did a great job of capturing the innocence of sport and play...”

— ROB DIAZ

Wide-Awake Wylie

In its early days, Wylie’s downtown area was a community gathering place, especially on Saturday nights, for those wanting to hear some music, shop for groceries and dry goods, or catch up on the latest gossip. As the railroad brought new visitors and new commerce, shop owners stayed open late to accommodate the crowds. The town’s nickname — Wide-Awake Wylie — was born and is depicted in the mural of the same name, painted by Roger and Karen Nitz.

The 10-foot-by-60-foot mural, painted on the side of a building adjacent to Olde City Park, forms a lively backdrop for park activities such as Easter egg hunts; Memorial Day and Veterans Day gatherings; outdoor concerts; and activities sponsored by the Wylie Downtown Merchants Association, including July’s Bluegrass on Ballard and October’s Boo on Ballard. The artwork was commissioned in 2012 as part of the observance of the city’s 125th anniversary; the Nitzes included the number “125” at random throughout the painting. Also included are a variety of icons, including hidden onions — on a tractor, in a streetlight, in a balloon — all playful nods to the city’s agricultural heritage when, in addition to being “wide awake,” Wylie was also known as the “Onion Capital of the World.”

The hidden icons attract visitors — especially children — to the mural, and

cries of “There’s another one! I found 125 in the clouds!” can be heard as they visit. Also incorporated are significant Wylie characters and culture: Mayor Eric Hogue waves, local businessman and Christian Care Center Executive Director Raymond Cooper drives the train, several community leading ladies watch the action from a bench, and a page of *The Wylie News* forms a paper airplane that flies by in the foreground.

Art for Heart’s Sake

Parks and Recreation Superintendent Rob Diaz said the community has benefited from the art projects in Wylie’s parks. “Children love interacting with the art, and its uniqueness draws them in. The artists did a great job of capturing the innocence of sport and play, which was what our

The mayor summed it up: “We often speak of ‘the Wylie difference,’ and our public art is an example of what we mean. We want the Wylie community to have a feeling of pride in and ownership of our park and recreation spaces. These works of art aren’t just lovely to look at; they represent the design and styles contributed to and approved of by those who pitched in to their funding and, more importantly, who will climb on them, bounce balls off of them, have their pictures made with them, and perhaps be inspired to throw that ball a little harder or jump a little higher. Public art will always be part of the big picture in Wylie parks.” ★

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Photos by Craig Kelly, City of Wylie Public Information

