

Park Pride Awards community building grants to DeKalb parks, including Little Creek Horse Farm



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Decatur, GA – DeKalb County Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs will receive \$145,000 for capital improvements to three neighborhood parks, on behalf of its Friends of the Park partners, a press release says.

The Park Pride's Grant Program awards funding to community groups seeking to revitalize their neighborhood parks. Contributions were provided in part through Park Pride's Community Building by The Home Depot Foundation.

One of those grants went to the Little Creek Horse Farm. The Friends of Little Creek Conservancy was awarded a \$50,000 grant and contributed another \$50,000 to enhance the park with an ADA-accessible overlook, visitors' center, and signage.

Other grantees include:

– The Friends of Briarlake Forest Park, awarded a \$45,000 grant and was allocated \$280,000 from Commissioner Jeff Rader's district funds. The friends group contributed \$5,000 toward the plan to convert a historic homestead into a nature center and a pavilion.

– The Friends of Hairston Park group, awarded a \$50,000 grant. Commissioner Steve Bradshaw provided \$50,000 match to develop a serenity garden with walking paths and bench swings.

Tucked away on Lawrenceville Highway across from North DeKalb Mall, Little Creek Horse Farm is an unusual part of the DeKalb County park system.

According to Jane Donofrio with the Little Creek conservancy, the county purchased the forty acre farm in 2004 as green space. The property, most of which is on a flood plain that makes it unsuitable for development, had originally belonged to the Sargent family (for whom Sargent Hills is named). It was a dairy farm up until the 1950s, when it became a horse farm.

“I moved here in 1962, and I really had not ridden but my parents were looking for something for me to do,” Donofrio said. When DeKalb County bought Little Creek, a group of people who had horses there formed the Conservancy to help out, “because there was nobody in the county government that knew how to run a horse farm.”

Little Creek Horse Farm has a large barn that houses the 45 horses boarded there, an indoor arena used for regular riding lessons, an outdoor arena used for hunter-jumper riding, 14 acres of pastures and an additional 14 acres of walking and riding trails. Boarders pay a monthly fee, and other funds come from both DeKalb County and the Little Creek Farm Conservancy.

To learn more about the horse farm, visit littlecreekfarmconservancy.com.

Sara Amis contributed to this story.

County Increases Green Space

7/5-21/04
by Mari Amaro

There was a Western feel to Saturday's official transfer of the Little Creek Horse Park to the county's ownership. Not only were Verron Jones and others on saddleback for the occasion, but documents were also given a seal of approval through branding-literally.

Located across from the North Dekalb Mall on Lawrenceville Highway, the 38-acre park, home to about 40 horses and in the same family ownership since before the Civil War, represents the latest acquisition of land by the county as part of an overall strategy to increase Dekalb's green space.

"The county bought the land because it allowed us to protect it in a commercial area," said Marvin Billups, assistant director of the county's Parks and Recreation Department.

The strategy of land acquisition came from a decision in 2000 to increase green space at the rate of 200 acres per year over the next 10 years, according to Billups.

Funds for land purchase were made available in 2001 with the creation of the Park Bond Program. The bond raised \$125 million, with 70 percent dedicated for land acquisition," said Billups. He also revealed that one of the reasons Little Creek was chosen was because of its proximity to Meadlock Park. Officials see potential to connect the two.

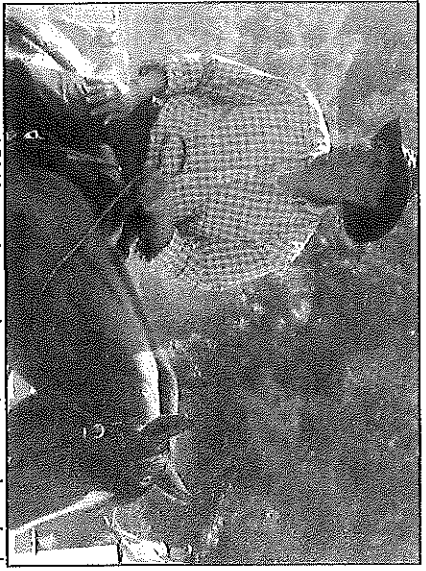
With the county now effectively landlords for the horses owners, Billups said that revenue from rent will be used to "put back into the farm, barns and stables and streams" that are located on the land.

The stream bank, which lies outside of the appropriation for horses, will now become part of a public-access area that the county hopes to develop as a multi-use trail. "This is one of the last undeveloped parcels of land within I-285. It will be

opened up for passive use: picnic area and bird watching," said Susan Hood, assistant County director of Park Bond and Green Space.

In addition to this latest acquisition and since the strategic plan was put into effect, the county has added 1,945 acres over 94 parcels of land. According to officials, funding for Little Creek came from a combination of sources: from the bond, state green space program funding, and a Blank Family Foundation Grant.

Vernon Jones' wearing of a Union-style cavalry hat was probably an appropriate touch at the farm. According to local historians, during the Battle of Atlanta, General Stoneman used the farm as a resting area for exhausted cavalry horses. Thousands of Union soldiers also camped along the banks of South Peachtree Creek, which runs through the farm.



Dekalb County CEO Vernon Jones makes an entrance on horseback moments before the transfer of ownership of Little Creek Horse Park. Photo by Burke Brennan.

As well as a popular place to take riding lessons, Little Creek has also served as a shelter for abused horses.

Georgia Equine Rescue League is one such organization that has actively used the farm for this purpose.