



Fort Foundation Focus

by Kathy Brady, Volunteer Publicist

Janesville might be known as “the city of parks” but thanks to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, our city may just be vying for that title sometime soon.

A variety of projects, including the Mush-Ko-Se-Day Park, the Community Wetland Walk, Fort Atkinson Glacial River Trail, Dorothy Carnes Park and Bark River Nature Park and Trail, display and preserve our natural resources while offering residents and visitors areas for recreation and learning.

In April 2004, \$20,000 was given from the Mary Hoard Fund, a fund within the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, to the Town of Koshkonong for Township Park, newly renamed Mush-Ko-Se-Day Park. This historical restoration will re-introduce three ecosystems native to the area, including the transformation of tilled fields to tall and short prairies, an oak savanna, and wetlands.

All three ecosystems will be restored to their natural state of when Wisconsin was still a U.S. territory. Foundation Directors Philip Jones and Don Henning reported to the Foundation that “the piece of land is beautiful and has great potential for becoming really special. The park will certainly be an asset to the community.”

Thanks to a \$14,500 donation from the Bertha and Marilyn Kuhl Fund (a fund within the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation), the Community Wetland Walk will now provide another venue for civic pride and reflection of nature’s wonder. Located on the former Outdoor Science Laboratory at the corner of South Main Street and Park Street, this once vibrant educational resource has been made better than new. Established by the School District of Fort Atkinson in 1965, under the direction of then science teachers Dick Wanie and Don Kneiart, generations of Fort Atkinson students first learned about wetlands and discovered the miracles of nature here.

The years, however, have taken their toll on the site. Invasive plants like cattails and reed canary grass have filled the open areas, choking out other life forms and making passage difficult or impossible for the students.

One of the outdoor laboratory’s original founders, Dick Wanie, is again helping create a wetland within the city on this nearly 45-year-old site. Notable improvements include a handicap-accessible boardwalk, which will allow this resource to be accessed by city residents and students alike. The district will create specific curriculum units to take full advantage of this unique resource. Under the direction of the Wisconsin DNR, the area was “scraped” in Fall 2003 to form two shallow ponds. After “resting” for a year, the area is ready for more development.

In another move, the Fort Foundation donated \$183,500 as a challenge grant to make possible the Fort Atkinson Glacial River Trail. This 2.2 mile trail will connect Fort Atkinson with the 6-mile Glacial River Trail, developed by Jefferson County.

Scott Lastusky, Director of Fort Atkinson Park and Recreation, acknowledged the support noting, “The Foundation really made this project possible by allowing the purchasing of the land.” The trail is expected to have 150,000 annual users.

The money from the Foundation was used to purchase the railroad right-of-way and the railroad bridge across the Rock River. The trail will be paved to accommodate all types of urban use, from bicycles and strollers to roller blades and wheelchairs and lighted to facilitate evening use. The trail is expected to open for use in spring or summer 2005.

The Community Foundation was approached in 2001 to provide funds for development of the newly acquired Dorothy Carnes Park. Although part of the Jefferson County Parks system, the proximity of the park to the city of Fort Atkinson and thus access to it by Fort Atkinson area residents is what convinced the Directors of the Foundation to grant \$50,000 to the project. These funds were instrumental in enabling the construction of the picnic shelter at the entrance to Dorothy Carnes Park. Joe Nehmer, director of the Jefferson County Parks Department, said “The shelter wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation.” In 2002 an additional challenge grant of \$25,000 (matched by an anonymous donor) was used to acquire property to expand the park.

In 1994, the Foundation donated \$9,750 to purchase land along the Bark River. This plot was adjacent to land already owned by the city and school district and has been developed as a passive recreational park. Entrance to the park is near Haumerson’s Pond at the east end of South Fourth Street. The Foundation had made other grants, which have been used to develop trails and construct a handicapped accessible fishing platform.

Other notable developments have included the Rotary Shelter in Rock River Park and the new concession stand and lights for the baseball field at Jones Park. Further improvements to the grandstand are scheduled over this winter and into the spring. The Foundation also helped make new lighting and goal posts possible for the fields in Rock River Park where the Youth Tackle Football League plays.

Donations to the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation of cash or stocks and bonds can be mailed to 244 N. Main Street, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. Information on setting up a Donor Advised Fund as well as planned giving information may be obtained by calling 920-563-3210 or writing to the above address.

Applications for grant requests are available by calling 920-563-3210, or e-mailing facf@idcnet.com. Visit the Foundation’s Web site at www.fortfoundation.org for more information and look for continuing coverage of the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation’s happenings in future columns in the Daily Jefferson County Union. All comments and inquiries are welcome.