

Clearlake Oaks celebrates new Nylander Park

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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CLEARLAKE OAKS – In another meaningful step forward for the little town of Clearlake Oaks, residents and county officials came together Saturday morning to celebrate the completion of the new Nylander Park, located in the town's center. {sidebar id=83}

The land was purchased from businessman Gary Nylander, whose Red and White Market is nearby, and who lends his name to the park.

Before the park dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony got under way, the Konocti Fiddle Club – featuring musicians of all ages – played a variety of traditional songs and reels.

The carefully designed, one-acre park has taken shape over the last eight months, said Kim Clymire, director of the county's Public Services Department, which includes the Parks Division.

"About eight months ago this was a dirt lot," said Clymire.

But a community-wide effort quickly moved things forward, he explained.

The work started last August. Chuck Lamb, Clay Shannon and Richard Kuehn got the transformation under way by getting the land cleared, said Clymire.

An old house on the property was an object of debate, as some people wanted to keep it. However, due to its poor condition, including a case of dry rot, Clymire said it was demolished.

In October, park employees installed irrigation and underground electrical, and constructed the park's stamped concrete sidewalks, which have a cobblestone look. The following month, 40 trees were planted – Chinese pistache, ginkgo biloba, red and valley oaks, magnolias, Raywood ash, flowering plums and pears, and crepe myrtles, said Clymire. The trees will bloom at different times to give the park an ever-changing appearance.

Then in December park staff brought in 800 yards of topsoil in preparation for the lawn, said Clymire. Park staff and Cal Fire's Konocti Conservation Camp crews installed 38,000 square feet of sod, rolling it out by hand. Benches, tables, bollards, barbecues and streets lights were added in February. Clearlake Oaks residents and businesses donated \$20,000 for trees and park furnishings.

The park includes many special touches that came from community suggestions, said Clymire.

One of them is the distinctive rock wall, which Judy Barnes with credited with proposing. The 380-foot-long wall matches the 1930s-era wall built by the Conservation Camp that lines the lakeside of Highway 20 between Glenhaven and Clearlake Oaks.

Rather than spend as much as \$100,000 for a company to build the wall, Clymire's staff took it on themselves, building it in two months. It was completed in May.

"A lot of you folks had a hand in designing this park," said Clymire, calling it a true grassroots effort.

Supervisor Jeff Smith credited the county staff for their work on the park, and said they made the county look good with their efforts.

Supervisor Denise Rushing recognized the Nylanders' generosity as well as the Board of Supervisors' support for the project. But most of all she credited the town's residents with having a lot of heart.

"These kinds of things can't happen without the vision of a broader group of people," she said.

Kelly Cox, the county's chief administrative officer, said he was very happy to see the park completed.

He recalled first approaching Nylander about selling the property to the county for the park several years ago. The men had a handshake agreement for the land purchase initially, but there were legal delays and years passed before the purchase could be completed. Cox said even though property prices had risen, Nylander kept his promise to sell the land at the original price.

"I can't thank him enough for what he and his wife have done for this community," said Cox.

He added, "What's really happened here is beyond my wildest dreams."

Cox recalled that the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to approve the land purchase.

Nylander Park, he said, is the nicest park in the county. That's thanks to the community creating its own park master plan.

Its completion is another major step forward for the town, which is experiencing other transformations. Cox said this past week the county relocated the last resident of Clark's Island, which also is slated to become a park space for the public.

Helen Locke, president of the Clearlake Oaks/Glenhaven Business Association, thanked the county for its work on the park and in other areas of town, such as its recent effort to install new landscaping in front of the grange building on Highway 20.

Locke said there is more work on the way as the town is recreated. But she pointed to the community's new sense of itself. To those who only saw Clearlake Oaks as being a rundown area, she said, "Baby, look at us now!"

Lamb, who credited Bill Rett for getting him involved with the park project, said he and wife, Holly Harris, moved to

Clearlake Oaks in 2000.

Like Locke, Lamb referred to the attitude he's encountered about Clearlake Oaks, but he said he believes the county was waiting for the community to give a direction for what they wanted to see for their town. The county then stepped up to the plate to support that vision.

Nylander also was welcomed to speak. In introducing him, Clymire said Nylander had offered to donate refreshments for the day's event. "He steps up to the plate again and again and again."

Taking the microphone, Nylander said, "Welcome to my park!" His statement was greeted with laughter and applause. He related that his grandmother, Cora Nylander, died in April at age 104. She and her husband came to Clearlake Oaks 75 years ago, and she ran the grocery store for 50 years before her grandson took over.

Gary Nylander said his grandmother was "ecstatic" about the rebirth the town has been undergoing.

He also shared a brief history of the land where the park is now located. "You have to remember history sometimes to move forward."

The park now sits on the former downtown area, where once there was a post office, restaurant, and barber and upholstery shops, said Nylander.

Nylander ended by telling community members, "This isn't my park, it's your park."

The park eventually will feature a display of ceramic tiles honoring those who assisted with making the park possible, said Clymire. Next door to the park, in a building the county purchased from Nylander for \$150,000, the county plans to build restrooms and a visitor center.

The Board of Supervisors also recently approved spending \$700,000 in special grant funds for several Northshore projects, including curb, gutter and sidewalks around Nylander Park's perimeter, which will be a finishing touch on the park.

The ceremony ended with county officials joining Nylander for the official ribbon-cutting, signifying the park's official opening. For a gallery of photos of the event, see the "Nylander Park Dedication" album on our gallery page, http://lakeconews.com/component/option,com_wrapper/Itemid,37/.

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