

Park to be magnet for community

Runners Rich and Carol Gossman are happy they will soon have a large city park a short jog from their west Omaha home.

In fact, with Sunday's opening of the \$1.2 million, 216-acre Lawrence Youngman Lake Park northwest of 192nd Street and West Dodge Road, the couple will have trails, a playground, a lake and a picnic area practically across the street.

"We run around our neighborhood now," said Rich Gossman, who lives in the nearby Five Fountains subdivision. "This is a continuation of that, so this is great."

Mayor Jim Suttle and Omaha parks officials will dedicate the park at 2 p.m. today.

It's the first large park of this size created in west Omaha since Lake Zorinsky was dedicated in 1993.

Smaller neighborhood parks are within walking distance of most residents' homes, but nothing with the size or amenities of Youngman Park.

Parks officials expect western Douglas County residents to use the area, as well.

"This is not a neighborhood park," said Parks Director Melinda Pearson. "The development of this new park is where we see the future of park development. It's a great addition."

Youngman Park was the jewel in the 2001 suburban park master plan. At just over 200 acres, though, the new park is significantly smaller than Zorinsky (1,023 acres), Standing Bear Lake (685 acres) and Cunningham Lake (1,403 acres).

"It's our smallest reservoir, but there's still going to be some really great fishing," Pearson said.

The park is named after Lawrence Youngman, who died in 2003 at age 98. A former World-Herald reporter and World War II correspondent, he founded the travel company Travel and Transport. Youngman's daughter and son-in-law, Judy and Jim Wigton, provided nearly half of the funding for the



development. The remaining cost was shared by the city's Parks Department, the Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Statewide Arboretum.



Judy Wigton said her dad was always a fan of public parks. Often, when the world traveler went to a new city or country, the first thing he did was find a local park.

In 1987, Youngman donated land to the city to help form the West Papio Trail.

A decade later, he donated more land to extend the trail for 13 unbroken miles.

“He loved parks,” Wigton said. “And he was always such an Omaha and Nebraska booster.”

This fall, the city will move a pavilion from Rosenblatt Stadium to the park as a picnic shelter. More parking also is in the works. Future additions could include an amphitheater and ballfields, if funding is available.

For Rich Gossman, the park's opening can't come soon enough.

“This will be one more place for us,” he said. “It will be great to have it in the neighborhood.”

By Maggie O'Brien
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