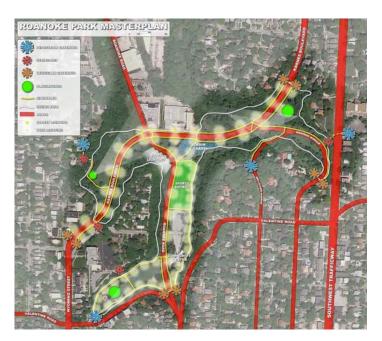
Community



PHOTOS BY DAVID EULITT | THE KANSAS CITY STAR



Randy Moore (left) and Chris DeLong helped plant a new tree in Roanoke Park last month during a volunteer gathering for the planting of 250 donated tree saplings. The volunteers have cleaned up invasive honeysuckle and helped clear out the wooded areas of the midtown park.

'HONEYSUCKLE WARRIORS'

Neighbors take charge of refurbishing Roanoke Park

By LYNN HORSLEY
The Kansas City Star
hey call themselves "honeysuckle warriors."

They are the dozens of residents living near Roanoke Park who have battled tirelessly over the past two years to remove invasive honeysuckle, pick up trash, build trails and reveal the park's hidden beauty.

They've won awards and have persuaded the city to provide \$150,000 for bigger improvements to the 38-acre park, roughly south of Karnes Boulevard near Roanoke Road.

It's been a lot of hard work, especially on weekends, when many residents could be relaxing or tending to their own homes. But it's also been a lesson in people's collective power to turn a neglected property into a wonderful community asset.

It's a story of "so many people not just helping with shovels but with wisdom, talent, ideas and dedication," said Curt Watkins, who lives in Roanoke, one of four historic neighborhoods abutting the park. Residents have also rallied to the cause from the Coleman Highlands, Volker and Valentine neighborhoods.

Roanoke resident Miles Krivena remembers how it all got started, with a Christmas party conversation in 2009. Krivena started chatting with Watkins about the park's deplorable condition, and how people were afraid to go there.

"Indeed, it was kind of creepy," Watkins recalled, describing how it was overrun with bush honeysuckle thickets, nuisance trees, weeds, trash, discarded furniture and some homeless camps.

The park has a natural amphitheater, playgrounds, tennis courts, a ball diamond and basketball goal, but was still depressing and underused.

At first, Watkins said, neighbors just complained and wondered, "Why doesn't the city do something about it?"

Then Krivena drove by Gillham Park in early 2010 and no-



A hickory tree stands in its new location in a wooded area of Roanoke Park.

ticed its appearance had improved from previous years. He called Watkins, who called veteran parks advocate Dona Boley. Boley has galvanized volunteers to tackle honeysuckle and other problems in Penn Valley Park, Gillham Park and elsewhere.

Boley mentored the Roanoke Park folks and told them they needed a plan. So Watkins started emailing neighbors, and the idea took off.

Residents and their friends pitched in with just the right skill-sets; they included architects, naturalists, website designers and outdoor enthusiasts.

While writing a master plan, they researched the park's history and found it was one of legendary park designer George Kessler's jewels. Developed between 1906 and 1909, it encompassed a lovely forested ravine surrounded by limestone bluffs and at least one cave. The park was part green space but also provided a welcome slice of wilderness right in the midst of the big city.

Watkins said that as volunteers removed the honeysuckle, they discovered two rugged rock cliffs that nobody even knew were there. They uncovered native trees and wild flowers that had been hidden by invasive plants.

They created a website (roanokeparkkc.org), held day-long public forums and conducted surveys that got more than 200 people involved in planning park improvements. In December, Watkins and others formed the non-profit Roanoke Park Conservancy, which has allowed them to raise several thousand dollars in donations for park amenities.

City Councilwoman Jan Marcason has high praise for the park restoration project, which is in her council district.

"They have mobilized whole neighborhoods and even beyond," she said. "They have worked like dogs every Saturday."

Park Director Mark McHenry commends the group, especially for producing a professional-caliber master plan that would have otherwise cost the department thousands of dollars. That plan helped persuade the city to provide \$150,000 this year for

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AN EXCELLENT EASTER

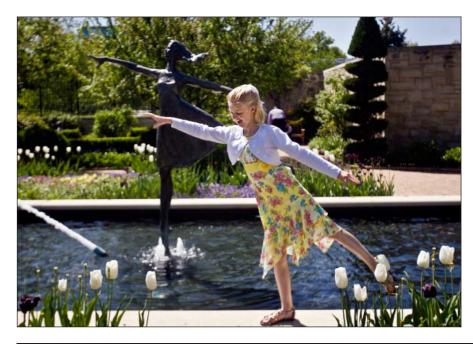


After collecting the girls' Easter eggs Sunday at the 15th Annual Hyde Park Easter Frolic, Nichole Garcia high-fived her daughter, Calise Garcia, 3. Garcia's other daughter, Kayliah Garcia, 4, is in the foreground. All live in Kansas City.



PHOTOS BY ALLISON LONG | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Brooks Gentleman showed off his dog, Sasha, a 3-year-old Australian shepherd mix, with her flying disc during the Hyde Park Easter Frolic. The event included an egg hunt, pony and horseback rides, face painting and photos with the Easter Bunny.





A butterfly landed on a Hessei Cotoneaster shrub on Sunday at the Ewing and Muriel Kauffman Memorial Garden east of the Country Club Plaza.

Fiona Junger, 9, of Prairie Village tries to strike a pose similar to the sculpture in the fountain Sunday at the Ewing and Muriel Kauffman Memorial Garden in Kansas City. Her family makes a point to visit the garden every Easter after church services.

ROANOKE

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new sidewalks and lighting. More funding could be awarded in the future.

The effort has garnered awards, including a recent citation from the Missouri Park and Recreation Association.

Roanoke Park also became the second Kansas City park to merit attention from Earth Riders, a recreational trails advocacy group that is developing 65 miles of trails in Swope Park.

Trail steward Brett Shoffner coordinated volunteers to com-

plete the first \(^1\structure\) sh-mile section of a new Roanoke Park nature trail that will be 2.5 miles in a few years.

"We really saw it as an opportunity for increasing trail access within an urban neighborhood," Shoffner said.

In late March, several dozen people also turned out to start planting about 250 tree and shrub seedlings donated by the Missouri Department of Conservation. The aromatic sumac, redbuds, dogwoods, oak and other seedlings will enhance the forested areas where the honey-suckle has been removed.

"We'd like to see a wide vari-

"It's like our own Central Park, right in the backyard. It makes it beautiful to live here."

MILES KRIVENA, WHOSE CHRISTMAS PARTY CHAT LED TO AN EFFORT BY FOUR NEIGHBORHOODS TO CLEAN UP ROANOKE PARK AND PLAN FOR ITS FUTURE

ety of native plants," said Waldo resident and volunteer naturalist Chris DeLong, who learned about the Roanoke Park effort from a relative who lives nearby. DeLong designed the website and has helped with much of the park cleanup.

Randy Moore, conservancy secretary, is also part of a core group of about 25 people who have given countless hours to

the cause.

"I love working outdoors" he said, adding that it's a welcome change from being stuck behind a computer all week.

The most gratifying result, Watkins said, is that people are starting to return to the park. Moms bring their children to the playgrounds. Athletes regularly use the soccer field and sand volleyball court.

Last fall, a band concert in the amphitheater lured crowds with blankets and picnic baskets and was so successful that it's on tap again for this fall.

Krivena notes that, in Europe, people flock to their city parks, and that's his goal for Roanoke as well. Put down the cellphone, leave the computer behind, and savor the park as an essential part of the neighborhood fabric.

"It's like our own Central Park, right in the backyard," he said. "It makes it beautiful to live here."

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