

Frick Park Continues to Blossom

Legend has it, according to the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, that Helen, daughter of Henry Clay Frick, when told she could have anything she wanted for her debutante party, “asked for a park where the children of Pittsburgh could enjoy nature.” Eleven years later, in 1919, 151 acres belonging to her father were bequeathed to the City of Pittsburgh following his death. The city acquired an additional 190 acres of land in 1925. Two years later, “Frick Park was born.”

What happened thereafter would have made Helen extremely proud. Instead of sticking to its original bounds or diminishing in size, Frick Park began to grow. Nearly a century has passed since the park’s inception, and yet, like a sequoia that becomes ever mightier through the years, the park continues to expand.

The most recent expansion occurred as part of a project aimed at revitalizing land near the Monongahela River where industrial waste was dumped for decades. Since the 1990s, when the project got underway, the site has been steadily blossoming into a residential development called Summerset at Frick Park.

All told, the new development will include more than 700 units, approximately two-thirds of which have already been constructed on a plateau in Squirrel Hill. Phase three of the project will involve constructing the rest of the planned units on a neighboring plateau adjacent to the Swisshelm Park neighborhood. Located between the two plateaus, in a sylvan valley, is the most recently added strip of park.

The newest piece of parkland stretches roughly from beneath the Parkway East near the Squirrel Hill Tunnel to the Monongahela River. Frick Park gained 106 acres through this expansion, pushing its total acreage up to 561, making Frick the largest park in the city.

Winding its way through the valley is a portion of Nine Mile Run Stream. Longtime residents of the East End may recall the days when Nine Mile Run gushed toward the Mon after heavy rainfall, carrying with it litter, pollutants and waste, while at the same time eroding the stream’s banks and threatening animal habitat.

Around the start of the new millennium, a restoration project was launched to address these issues. The project was a 7.7 million dollar undertaking supported by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Pittsburgh’s Department of City Planning. Brenda Smith, Executive Director of the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association, said that those

involved in the restoration responded to problems by, among other things, reconfiguring stream channels, rebuilding and constructing new wetlands, and creating pool-riffle sequences to slow and oxygenate the water.

Paralleling the stream is a path aptly named Nine Mile Run Trail. A segment of the trail, which was completed in 2012, moves from one end of the valley to the other in a peaceful setting. Bikers, joggers, and walkers can exercise or relax there in the company of birds and butterflies, listening to the stream as it gurgles along.

According to Craig Dunham, Project Manager for Summerset Land Development Associates, there are plans to add more trails in the area. The new paths will connect the Summerset at Frick Park residences located on either side of the valley to Nine Mile Run Trail.

“Summerset residents will enjoy easy access to the public park,” Dunham said in reference to Frick.

Park-goers who live elsewhere can access Nine Mile Run Trail by parking in the lot next to the Lower Frick Park Play Area, in the small lot located on Commercial Street, or in the lot in Duck Hollow, situated on the Mon. To reach the trail from Duck Hollow, circle back to Old Browns Hill Road—the trail begins up the hill on the right.

If it's true that Frick Park grew out of Helen Clay Frick's wish to give Pittsburgh's children a place to enjoy nature, Helen would be proud today. For today, people of all ages can enjoy what has become the city's largest park, a wooded retreat that stretches from Point Breeze, where the Fricks used to live, to the Monongahela River, where the most recently added piece of parkland continues to develop.

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