

Work begins at Newport's Veterans Park

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By Jim T. Ryan, Staff Writer

Construction at Newport's Veterans Memorial Park began March 9 as part of a grand plan to renovate and add to the facility.

"Everything came together rather quickly," said Frank Campbell, president of the Newport Revitalization & Preservation Society.

Although the project is four years in the making, the last several months saw things accelerate, he said.

When all is said and done, the park will get a new concession stand and rest rooms, as well as new parking and walkways in its first phase. The project also will add more playground equipment in time, picnic areas, improved parking, and upgrades to ballfields.

Campbell was joined by state, county and local officials and residents for the golden-shovel groundbreaking on the park's west side.

"I'm so much looking forward to this project being completed," said Newport Mayor Mary Hetrick.

She grew up near the park and remembers how much it meant, so to revitalize it would only better the community.

"I played Little League baseball here," council president Gerald Robinson said. "Poorly, I might add."

Robinson said the park revitalization was part of rebuilding Newport for future generations.

The \$307,000 project was funded by local donations, along with a matching grant from the state. Newport residents and other friends of the park raised more than \$153,000, Campbell said.

"It's a great project that came from the bottom up," said state Sen. Rob Teplitz at the groundbreaking, praising residents for their drive.

When residents believe in something like the park, that makes it all the easier to support grants to help, said state Rep. Mark Keller.

"You have been thinking outside the box for many years on this project," he said.

The general contractor on the project is New Bloomfield-based WSL Inc. After all the photos were taken and the golden shovels put away, a WSL bulldozer tore into the soft ground to begin laying the foundation for the new concession stand and bathrooms.

The company's president, Wayne Leshner, said local subcontractors and material would be used on the project.

"A project like this is important because it improves our community," he said.

While the revitalization society worked on a grand vision for the park, Newport High School students helped build playground equipment and plant gardens.

In particular, the high school's Environmental Club was instrumental in the efforts.

"As a community, I know we can grow through this project," said Katie Geyer, president of the Environmental Club. "I can't wait to come back from college and see it completed."

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