

# Community Action in Carlisle

*DCNR funding and neighborhood groups help make a measurable impact in borough parks*

By **Andrea C. Crouse**, Director of Parks and Recreation, Carlisle Borough

It is said that success breeds success and in Carlisle Borough, Cumberland County that cliché is holding true.

Carlisle has seen a trend in neighborhood groups helping with park revitalization right in their own backyards. With help from three different neighborhood groups and funding from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Carlisle Parks and Recreation Department has upgraded two neighborhood parks and is working on a third.

In 2010, borough council approved a renovation plan presented by the East Side Neighbor Association (ESNA) for upgrades to Biddle Mission Park that included a walking trail around the perimeter of the five acre park, two parking lots, park benches and tree planting. Funding for the trail and parking areas came from the Partnership for Better Health and Community Development Block Grant funding.

Through the TreeVitalize program, DCNR funded the tree planting at the park. Initial

renovations sparked other renovations that included the construction of two sand volleyball courts and installation of four exercise stations along the trail. Since the renovation of the park, measurable improvements in the amount of visitors and those seen exercising has increased.

The ESNA's project at Biddle Mission Park has led the way for other Carlisle neighborhood groups to improve their neighborhood park.

In 2012, the South of South Street Neighborhood Association (SoSo) presented an improvement plan to the Carlisle Parks and Recreation Board for the Butcher Family Tot Lot. The plan included the addition of playground equipment and surfacing material, fencing, landscaping, park benches and repainting lines on the basketball court. The plan was formally accepted and in May 2013 a grant application was submitted to the Cumberland County Planning Department for a Cumberland County Land Partnerships Grant, which is sourced from the Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy Fund. The

upgrades for the Butcher Family Tot Lot were completed in December 2013.

Currently, the parks and recreation department is working with Carlisle West Side Neighbors (CWSN) to fund renovations to Heberlig-Palmer Park. In community meetings, residents of the area emphasized security concerns, noting Heberlig-Palmer is perceived as unsafe because of drug use and violence in the area. The two groups are working together on a plan to address these problems. In April a grant application was submitted to DCNR to help address safety issues in the park, and the CWSN has raised funds to install security lighting and a security camera and will help the borough in funding this much-needed park renovation.

While Heberlig-Palmer Park is just five acres, plans are to incorporate a multitude of active, moderate and passive recreational opportunities for youth and adults. Park amenities will include a multi-purpose athletic field, walking path, natural playscape, natural amphitheater, edible

Photo courtesy of Shari Minnich, ESNA



**VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE** An East Side Neighbor Association member pitches in during a neighborhood, summer clean-up at Biddle Mission Park

landscaping and raised bed gardens. Some areas of the park will be left green and open while others will be densely planted to create immersive natural pockets throughout the park.

Parks are an integral part of the community. Research shows residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces enjoy stronger social ties. The uptick in

interest for improvements to the borough's parks is a testament that parks are valuable to people.

From a parks and recreation department standpoint, it is exciting to listen to ideas from neighborhood groups and then see those ideas come to fruition. In Carlisle, each association took it upon themselves to poll their neighborhood for what they would like to see in the

neighborhood park.

The neighborhood associations have done an outstanding job of capturing the needs and wants of their neighborhoods. This cooperative approach to park renovation has been successful because everyone's end goal is to achieve beautiful and useful parks that improve quality-of-life for the community. **(B)**