

Dauphin County Parks and Recreation CASE STUDY

Dauphin Connects Community to Nature with Environmental Art



Background:

Dauphin County Parks and Recreation has pioneered an exciting format for the discovery of art and nature. *Art In The Wild* is an outdoor environmental art exhibition at Wildwood Park. This public art exhibit features naturally inspired trailside creations along the park's wandering trails and wetlands.

Rationale:

The goals of the project are to present quality outdoor art using natural material, harmonize and integrate art into the landscape, provide public educational opportunities, involve the community, and attract new audiences to the park. *Art In The Wild* is a terrific match with Wildwood Park's mission. It is one of many park programs that teach people about the natural world and welcomes visitors to enjoy and learn about its natural and cultural resources. The park is always looking to attract new visitors and "invigorate" loyal users. The exhibit is one more way to bring awareness to Wildwood's mission — preserving, enhancing and interpreting the park's resources.

Resources Required:

Art In the Wild is sponsored by the Friends of Wildwood, Dauphin County Commissioners and TheBurg. The *Art In The Wild* committee, vital to the project's success, consists of eight dedicated volunteers who spearheaded the exhibition planning and development.

Wildwood Park provides an ideal site for this project. Located within the City of Harrisburg, Wildwood Park is south central Pennsylvania's premier public urban wetland and study area. The park's 229 acres include a 90 acre wetland, nature center, 6 miles of trails and 1.5 miles of accessible boardwalks. This park has evolved from a booming recreation destination in the early 1900s as part of the "City Beautiful" movement, to a lifeless city dump in the 1940's and 50's, to the present day urban wetland park attracting 100,000 people annually. The park is a repeat destination for residents as well as tourists. It provides vital green spaces and pristine freshwater wetland habitat for wildlife. Wildwood Park has been owned and managed by Dauphin County since 1977.

Process:

Organizers of the project look for playful, intriguing art to delight, confound or give pause to the viewer. Artists are encouraged to foster a lively mingling between park visitors and outdoor art. The exhibit is open to anyone wishing to submit an idea for an outdoor art installation. Eligible applicants include professional artists, non-professionals, students, naturalists, schools and nature lovers — basically anyone or group of people wanting to explore and show their appreciation of the natural world in an artistic way.

Elementary and high school students, teachers, architects, non-professional and professional artists send proposals. Most proposals are from local residents. More recently, however, proposals have been received from artists from Canada, New York and South Carolina. The 2014 show observed a tremendous growth in installations in only one year—from 9 at the 2013 inaugural show to 15 this year. This growth reflects the great increase in applications received. Received applications are reviewed by jurors and select projects are accepted for installation.

Installations are judged and first, second, and third prizes are awarded. Thanks to generous donations, monetary awards are presented to the winners at the Artist's Reception. This year's judge was Daniel Mack, New York artist, writer, and teacher. Dan said, "I was so impressed with this event last year, I started a sister one here in New York".

Park visitors are able to watch and interact with the artists during the installation process. By exploring the environmental art, visitors see positive human interaction with nature. Visitors are also able to talk to the artists at various times throughout the seven month exhibit, during special site programs and tours. A special area encourages visitor interaction. Here visitors can embrace and express their own creativity by experimenting with natural materials, such as stones, sticks, pinecones, beads, string, cloth and bits of paper, at this hands-on art areas. The Create Your Own Art in The Wild areas are meant to constantly change as different visitors express their own imaginations.

New for the 2014 exhibit, park visitors were asked to vote for their favorite exhibit. This year's "People's Choice" awards will be presented at Wildwood Park's Annual Celebrate Wildwood event on September 28, 2014.

Challenge Overcome

Initially, it was a challenge to get the word out and clearly explain artists what we were looking for and attempting to do.

