

Park along the Grand River rehabilitates pond, wetlands

By Kevin Crowley

RECORD STAFF

A new park on the banks of the Grand River in Kitchener is being hailed as a true community project.

The Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area, officially opened on Saturday, is the result of a long collaboration between city hall, a service club, local companies, educational institutions, community agencies and numerous individuals.

"We can certainly say the Stanley Park Optimist Natural Area is a true community park," said Dan Daly, Kitchener's director of parks and environmental services.

The park is located on the west side of the Grand River at the Victoria Street crossing. It includes 3.6 hectares on the north side of Victoria Street and 6.4 hectares on the south side.

Connected to hiking trail

The park includes a canoe launch, fishing docks, picnic facilities and hiking trails that will connect with the Walter Bean Grand River Community Trail, a proposed 73.5-kilometre path that will eventually link Woolwich Township, Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge and North Dumfries.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the new park is the rehabilitation of the area's pond and wetland habitat.

Part of the park is situated on the site of an old gravel pit that has been transformed into two ponds, both of which serve as spawning and nursery waters for warm-water fish.

A narrow band of land separates the ponds from the Grand River, but a water link exists

through a culvert.

As well as providing a fishing spot for local anglers, the ponds will serve as a "booster station" to help young fish mature before re-entering the river, said Chris Bunt, a fisheries scientist who worked on the rehabilitation.

The culvert link with the river was opened last year and already the ponds are teaming with fish.

River thriving

Bunt said the Grand River is thriving these days and includes a healthy variety of fish, including minnows, sunfish, bass and northern pike.

The official opening of the park was a dream come true for the Stanley Park Optimists.

The club's goal 15 years ago was to help rehabilitate part of the Grand River, said vice-president Mark Kerr.

It has been raising money for the project through the annual Grand River Bass Derby and a trout pond event at the annual outdoor show at Bingemans in Kitchener.

Last year, the club donated \$35,000 to the park project and has committed to donate \$5,000 per year for the next five years for development and maintenance, Kerr said.

"I think it really shows our long-term commitment to the area," he said.

Other financial support came from the City of Kitchener, Natural Sports, Bingemans, and the Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Fund.

The Optimists also provided volunteer work, as did a number of other groups, including Hope Harbour, Anchor House, the University of Waterloo and Grand River Collegiate.