



## Going to the dogs?

### Fundraising continues for proposed canine park

By Todd McMahan • The De Pere Journal • July 22, 2010

As the answer man for all things trees in De Pere, City Forester Don Melichar puts the tree count at more than 250 on a prime piece of real estate.

The nearly 20-acre property in the west-side industrial park is owned by the city. Instead of turning it over to and blending it in with the established commercial sect, the grassy, woody flat land has been earmarked for occupancy by some four-legged animals.

More than 18 months in the works, contributors to a De Pere dog park are hopeful the proposed endeavor becomes reality.

"People want to see it. They really do," Melichar said. "They want to see it happen. It's just taken some time."

Melichar, who has played an integral role in the project as a representative for the city, has fielded several calls in recent months regarding the park. Some local residents are under the impression it is open and inquire about its location.

Melichar and his fellow committee members on the De Pere Dog Park Association — whose motto is "Unleash the Fun!" — are making inroads on giving dog owners another venue to turn their canines loose in an enclosed area.

"I love to see my dog free. I love to watch 'em run," said John Smits, a De Pere resident who has an 8-year-old golden retriever, Lady.

Smits and his wife, Jo, are part of the De Pere Dog Park Association committee, which is composed of a dozen dog-loving citizens from the area who have devoted hundreds of hours to drumming up support for the project.

The city of De Pere isn't contributing a dime to the startup of the park. That has put the onus on the dog park group, which has about 200 people on its

mailing list, to raise approximately \$25,000 that is needed to open the park.

"We take what we can get. It all counts," John Smits said. "We've got to get some big donors."

The volunteers from the association have been in fundraising mode since the city gave its blessing in late 2008 to turn the vacant site off Biotech Way into a dog park.

Of late, donations of \$1 and \$5 were taken from shoppers at Festival Foods in De Pere for a two-week period that ended Sunday. The dog park group also raised money throughout the three-day Pink Flamingo Classic at Legion Park last weekend.

"We're trying to get our final push in to get this park opened this year," said Laurie McMorran, a committee member from Green Bay, along with her husband, Glenn.

Before those recent fundraisers, Melichar said about \$13,000 had been donated or verbally committed to the project, including two contributions of \$5,000 each from individual donors.

Getting to the targeted \$25,000 would ensure the initial phase of a multi-phase plan that has a projected price tag of \$275,000.

The first phase would include the fencing that is a prerequisite to opening the park. A portable

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bathroom, benches, waste station and signage also are included in the proposed start-up budget.

"We wouldn't need all of the amenities, but we could get it open," Melichar said. "Our city attorney (Judy Schmidt-Lehman) has said to get it open you need the fence."

Some of the materials already are in hand. Outagamie County donated more than 3,000 linear feet of fencing that it replaced at Outagamie County Regional Airport near Appleton.

The 6-foot-high chain-link fence would have to be buried by a foot if and when ground is broken on the dog park.

"It's a good donation, but it's going to take some work to make it pliable," John Smits said.

Melichar said some smaller fencing also was recently donated by a De Pere family, which could be used to enclose an area for small dogs that would be situated at the front of the park.

Melichar and others from the dog group aren't ruling out having the park open later this year with the necessary funding. He said the fencing could be erected in just a couple weeks.

"Given good weather, could we get it up in November? Yeah, you could," Melichar said. "And, people could still utilize it maybe this winter."

"It would be nice to have a big donor out there," added Mary Cornelissen of De Pere, a committee member. "Just to get the fence up because then the city would start grooming it and it would look more like a usable dog park. Right now, it's a little bit weedy."

The city has agreed to take care of the upkeep of the park, which would include brush removal before the park opens and regular mowing.

The proposed site is bordered to the east by railroad tracks and to the west by a railroad spur that connects to Green Bay Packaging Inc. Visitors to the park would cross the spur on Biotech Way to reach the parking lot and entrance for the park, but Melichar said the spur is rarely used, so it wouldn't cause an inconvenience.

The land includes two retention ponds. The fencing around the perimeter would keep park users away from the water closest to the front of the proposed park.

A bigger pond in the back of the property would be inside the park boundaries. Park organizers envision making that pond an area where dogs could splash with the construction of docks, which is part of the long-range plan for the park.

Other future projects would include security lighting, an open shelter, a paved parking lot and a permanent bathroom facility.

The park won't have a user fee, though a donation box will be at the entrance.

De Pere resident Mike Stumpf, one of the original proponents of a dog park in his hometown, feels the outdoor facility would be a popular addition for the city.

Stumpf and his wife, Julie, who also is part of the De Pere dog park group, frequent the dog parks in Hobart and Kaukauna with their 1-year-old yellow Labrador, Bailey.

"There are a lot of people that go there frequently, and it becomes really a sense of community," said Mike Stumpf, adding of the De Pere park, "It's going to be a nice size. You can actually take your dog for a walk and go through the woods."

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The hundreds of trees on the site, including some 50 towering oaks, will shade humans and pooches alike as they walk and traipse through the park, which will have marked trails.

"If they get the fence up, the rest will come in short order," John Smits said. "We're not going to give up."

**FYI ...**

The De Pere Dog Park Association holds regular meetings on the first Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. at De Pere Municipal Service Center, 925 S. Sixth St. The meetings are open to anyone who would like to be updated about the status of the proposed De Pere dog park, provide input and/or join the association.

For information, contact City Forester Don Melichar by phone at (920) 339-8362 or e-mail at [dmelichar@mail.de-pere.org](mailto:dmelichar@mail.de-pere.org).

The De Pere Dog Park Association Web site is [www.deperedogpark.com](http://www.deperedogpark.com).



A railroad spur borders the nearly 20 acres of city-owned unoccupied land in the west-side industrial park off Biotech Way that has been earmarked for a dog park in De Pere. (Todd McMahon/The De Pere Journal)



De Pere Dog Park Association committee members Mary Cornelissen, from left, Mike Stumpf and Glenn McMorran walk with their dogs — Riley, a West Highland White Terrier; Bailey, a yellow Labrador; and Bella, a pug — at the proposed site for a De Pere dog park on the southwest side of the city. (Tara Day/The De Pere Journal)

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Bailey, a 1-year-old yellow Labrador owned by De Pere Dog Park Association committee members Mike and Julie Stumpf, splashes in a retention pond at the site of the proposed park. (Tara Day/The De Pere Journal)

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