

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Habitat for Humanity gives facelift to Jeannette park

By Dirk W. Kaufman
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Radar has picked up where Showboat left off at North End Arlington Park in Jeannette.

The park, sporting graffiti from the early 1980s, will be refurbished and refreshed over the next few weeks thanks to the Central Westmoreland Habitat for Humanity.

The service organization will soon "blitz build" a new home on Arlington Avenue for a single mother and her 6-year-old son. That house project will begin and end the first week of June. The single-week effort is part of the Home Builders Blitz, an initiative of the national Habitat for Humanity that will see hundreds of homes build across the country in a week.

One of the building committee members is Jeannette contractor Charles "Radar" Yandrick. He suggested to the city that the park about four houses down from the new home's lot could look much better, and said a coordinated effort could see the work through.

Recreation board Chairman Mark Clark quickly accepted the offer.

"That's one thing that's good about Jeannette," Clark said on Saturday, the first day of the multi-weekend project. "When you have a project that's a worthwhile project like this, they come out and help."

The park had been cared for by neighbors in the community for many years. The rectangular piece of land is about four home lots wide and is bordered on two sides by chain-link fence.

A 12-foot-high concrete wall supporting chain-link fence borders Arlington Avenue. Names painted on the wall in the early '80s date the last period the park was upgraded.

Budget and manpower constraints limit what can be done at the various parks in the community, Clark said. The Habitat for Humanity offer to help was a pleasant surprise.

The local Habitat chapter's executive director, Leyla Pilon, said the project is "a good fit."

"It's not something that we typically do," she said. "The city of Jeannette's always been very good to us when we need whatever. Our office and our warehouse are based in Jeannette, as well.

"So we just thought, we're putting a home in for a single mom and a 6-year-old boy, the playground's right here, it needs a little work"

Showboat Crowell, a former janitor in the Jeannette school system who passed away some years ago, lived adjacent to the park and helped to maintain it. Clark said the community maintenance effort eventually stalled and the city took back responsibility.

Clark said he remembers playing basketball games at Arlington when he was young. Teams from the South Side traveled to the North Side for games against neighborhood boys.

The volunteers plan to patch missing shingles on the small pavilion, place mulch under existing playground equipment and swings, and spread gravel underneath the fence.

The volunteers hope to use excavation equipment for a drainage system to alleviate a problem with standing water in one small section.

"I know that there are a lot of kids that come down here when it's warm," Pilon said. "I was down here a couple of weeks ago, and there were probably at least 15 kids here.

"So it definitely is used. We eventually want to paint the lines on the basketball court so you could actually shoot from the foul line, things like that."

She said the fading graffiti will be painted over, and she's taken initial steps toward having a mural painted on the concrete wall.

"That's a thought, but we're not sure. We'll see when we get to that point," Pilon said.

The project will take several weeks, and board members from Habitat for Humanity and other volunteers are expected to participate, feeding the need to serve while the nearby house goes up quickly.

"We're still helping the community; we're still doing our thing," Pilon said.

Dirk W. Kaufman can be reached at dkaufman@tribweb.com or 724-836-6007.

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