

# Centennial Reflections

## *Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society*

### Oakwood is home to 10 different Parks

*By Harry G. Ebeling*

Parks – maybe not a big item in your life – or maybe one of the main reasons you like Oakwood – but we should be proud of our long commitment to them. For a small city in terms of area, we have a remarkable number of parks. Click them off in your mind as we tour them.

Among the most prominent is Houk Stream, which was created in 1912 by the cooperative efforts of Elizabeth P.T. Houk, Henrietta Parrott and John H. Patterson. Located at the intersection of Ridgeway Road, Oakwood Avenue, Park Road and Forrer Road, it consists of 13.7 acres restricted for park purposes forever. In 1986 it was renamed Friendship Park in honor of our sister cities in France and Canada. The part between Ridgeway and Forrer Road is known as Elizabeth Gardens in honor of Mrs. Parrott's mother Elizabeth Forrer.

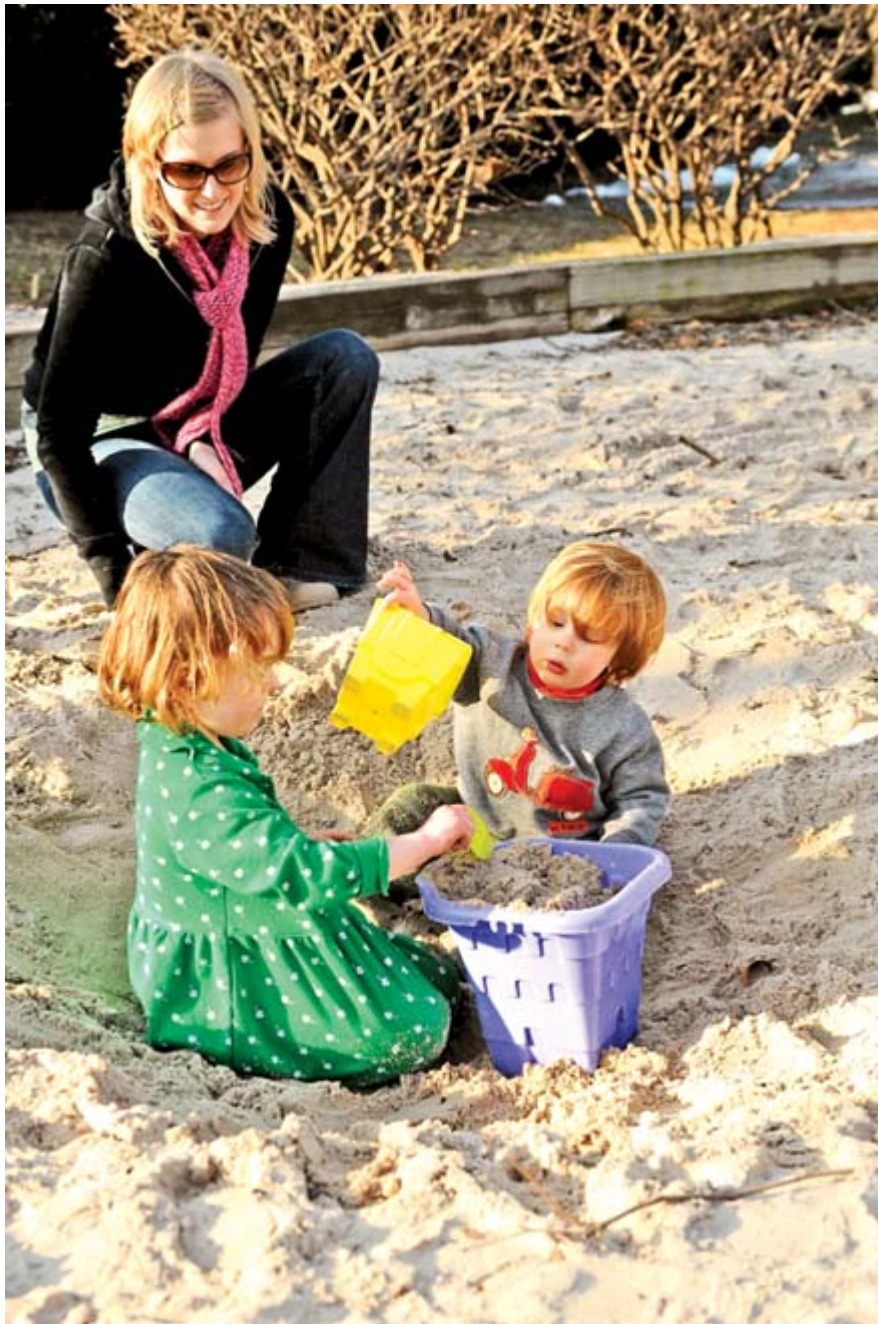
Nearby is the newest park, accessed from Runnymede Road and adjacent to Friendship Park, purchased by the city in 2007 and named Centennial Park, for out door enjoyment, study, and recreation. Its 3.1 acres is to be maintained in its natural state, and will not have any playground equipment or ball fields. A master plan will be developed for future guidance.

Between Forrer and Park Roads is a one and a half acre park known as Loy Gardens. It was created in 1929 by the will of Katherine Loy next to the Loy's home on Park Road. In 1990 the Garden Club of Dayton restored the park which had become overgrown. With the help of the city and support from the Rotary Club, they added dogwood, daffodils, and mulch for paths. The garden has hundreds of crocus bulbs planted whose flowers break through the soil and bloom as a harbinger that Spring is on its way. Wildflowers, a small brook and a footbridge all complement one of Oakwood's best-kept secrets. By taking a little walking on Forrer Road, a walker can access the other above named parks.

Fairridge Park on Fairmont Avenue is between Fairmont and Ridgeway. The Ridgeway side was donated by Frederick Patterson and Dorothy Patterson Judah in 1924 for use as a water tower and playground. The Fairmont Avenue side was donated by developer Carl Shultheis. The playground is shadowed by the water tower, which originally was a Tudor architecture design. The city planted trees for screening the water tower in 1991.

Shafor Park on Patterson Road between Shafor Blvd. and E. Schantz Avenue was created by Walter Shafor conveying the four acres for the building and tennis courts now known as the Community Center to its predecessor, The East Oakwood Club in 1919. The building was built by a non-profit corporation sponsored by John H. Patterson. It maintained an active social program until 1928. When the club closed, it was conveyed with the rest of the land on the block to the city. An outdoor basketball court and playing fields added in 1991 have added to its popularity. Nothing happened in the building during the Depression and during WW II, when it was the Draft Board. In

1949 it was leased to the Y.M.C.A. for an active youth program. The Gardner family donated the swimming pool to the city in 1969, adding to the program of the "Y". In 1987 after 37 years of operation, the lease was terminated and the city undertook the program with a new Leisure Services Department. After two years and the investment of \$850,000, it became a popular multi-generational facility operating many programs.









Orchardly Park at Delaine Avenue between Orchard and Wonderly avenues was given to the city in 1928 by Henry Coleman, a local developer. Originally given the name Wonderly Park, in 1993, the city upgraded the park with a \$212,000 investment for play equipment, walkways, and handicap access as well as landscaping. Citizens raised \$5,500 for the landscaping project.

Irving Field Park located outside Oakwood on Irving Avenue, is 6.234 acres acquired in 1979 and in 1980. Part of it was bought for expanding the city's well field. The city created three soccer fields with the movement of 13,000 cubic yards of earth and an investment of \$177,894 plus \$62,500 from the county Children's Services Levy. Opened in 1982, it has parking for 70 cars, an equipment storage building and restrooms. It became hockey fields in the 90's when soccer fields were made available by leasing property at Old River from NCR.

An obscure postage stamp park is located at the corner of Schenck Avenue and Far Hills Avenue. Donated by the Adam Schantz Estate in 1912, it consists of one lot and has no purpose whatever. It has no plaque, no fence, only a bench and is restricted from building.

We have discussed the park dedicated to the memory of Col. Robert Patterson at Far Hills and Oakwood avenues in a previous article.

Last but certainly not least, Smith Gardens is one of Oakwood's premier destinations for residents and non-residents. Created by the will of industrialist Carlton Smith, it is at the corner of Oakwood Avenue and Walnut Lane. He also devised his residence to the city so that its sale could provide funds for maintaining the gardens. The sale produced \$110,000, but this wasn't enough, and since 1981 the community has supported the upkeep by fund raising. There is a stucco host building and a utility building. Several musical events show off the park each summer. The city's Leisure Services Department and Service Department contribute to maintaining this beautiful crown jewel of the city.

In 1987, citizens became concerned about the future of the .6 acre corner of Far Hills Avenue and West Schantz Avenue. With a lead gift from the Huffman family, funds were raised to purchase and improve the land and create a permanent maintenance fund. A gazebo and marker were constructed and landscaping added so that Mary Reynolds Huffman Park is now a signature entranceway to Oakwood. A small tract at the rear has been a park since 1937, when it was donated to the city as a condition for constructing the gas station which stood there for many years.

And now – the biggest undertaking by the city ever – the leasing in 2006 of 28 acres of NCR's Old River for a soccer field complex. This is located in the City of Dayton, and will be accessed by a new road planned to enter from Volusia Avenue and Far Hills Avenue. These fields have been leased by the city previously, but now are under Oakwood's exclusive control. More about this venture when we discuss Sugar Camp.