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Volunteers rebuild Gil Lynn Park

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DAYTON - Hot dogs, hamburgers and town pride have fueled about \$100,000 worth of improvements into Dayton's Gil Lynn Park.

For the past seven years, the five volunteer members of Dayton's park board and other active citizens have staffed the concession stand at the city-owned park, selling food to make the park a desirable place for families and children.

The park board in the past month finished a new playground for toddlers and put in new playground equipment at a cost of \$40,000. In 2007, they put in basketball courts for \$50,000.

The proceeds have come from concessions sold by volunteers.

"It is a lot of hot dogs we had to sell," said Denise Ashford, who has volunteered on the park board for seven years. "We tried to get grants but have always been declined. The community, without our people that come out and support everything down here, we could not do that."

Some in the community, such as park board member Denise Smith and her husband, Allen, seven years ago wanted to make the weathered, aging park safer and more welcoming.

"We wanted a nice, safe place for our daughter to play," Allen Smith said.

Their daughter is now 18, but they still volunteer.

Allen Smith does landscaping at the park, spins records as a DJ at park events and works the concessions.

Volunteers staff the concession stand at special events and youth baseball games. Their biggest event, Rockin' on the River Music Fest, raises \$5,000 to \$7,000.

Park board members said they believe they succeeded in making Gil Lynn Park a great community gathering spot. Since the improvements, the park has been the site of birthday parties, a wedding and a wake.

Dozens of children travel daily from nearby schools to play during recess and after school. The new playground equipment now allows teachers to take children there every day.

"It has been huge for everybody," said Lincoln Elementary Principal Bonnie Sizemore. "I think the park board did a great job. The park board works really well together."

Karlissa Stepner from Fort Thomas takes her two daughters, ages 1 and 2, to the park because the equipment design is safe for toddlers.

"It is a nice park that is enclosed and safe," Stepner said.

The park's 11 security cameras have also curbed vandalism and criminal mischief, said Rick Lucas,

Dayton's park director. The park has had four instances of vandalism in the past several years, he said. The perpetrators in each case were caught and sentenced to community service in the park, Denise Smith said. They helped in selling concessions or cleaning the park, she said.

The park board has now set its sights on replacing the park's 12 picnic tables, which will cost about \$8,000 total. The park board receives \$22,000 annually from the city to maintain the city's three parks, with Gil Lynn being the largest. That leaves nothing for capital improvements, Ashford said.

"We did this ourselves," Ashford said. "We couldn't get any grants."
