



City parks become part of national, state registries

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UTICA — The city park system's inclusion in the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places was celebrated Tuesday with a ceremony in F.T. Proctor Park.

The honor, bestowed upon F.T. and T.R. Proctor Parks, Roscoe Conkling Park/Valley View and the Memorial Parkway, came just before the 100th anniversary of the park system and follows three years of work by local departments and agencies, officials said.

William Locke, president of the Central New York Conservancy, said having the parks recognized for their historic significance involved documenting their history and searching for early pictures and original drawings. Researchers even traveled to the Olmsted archives in Boston to look at documents, he said.

The result was official acceptance into the national register on July 3, 2008.

"The main significance is that it creates awareness of a green space that Utica has that has tremendous importance and historic perspective," Locke said.

The land used for Utica's parks was donated to the city by the Proctor family, and the parks were landscaped by the firm of Frederick L. Olmsted, the same landscape architect responsible for New York City's Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace, he said.

Mayor David Roefaro was on hand at the ceremony to read an official proclamation from the city, and to thank the Central New York Conservancy for its assistance in preserving the parks.

"Utica's parks system is many things to many people," he said. "It is the mission and purpose of the Central New York Conservancy to ensure that residents and visitors alike may continue to use and value the parks now and in the future."

Recent improvement projects at F.T. Proctor Park included the installation of a new butterfly garden and a new fence. Work is under way to plant additional trees around the walking trail, as well, City Parks and Recreation Commissioner David Short said. Locke also thanked the city and the consultants who worked with the Conservancy for their assistance on the project and said their efforts would help preserve "a gem of this community."

"These landmarks are what differentiate us from all of these other cities," he said. "We have history."

Officials also said much of the credit for the historic register listings belonged to Erica Max, a Conservancy consultant who was unable to attend the ceremony. Max was responsible for writing the historic register applications, as well as doing much of the research that went into them, said fellow consultant Katechem Cardamone.

"I really feel that it was because of her research and writing that we got this designation," Cardamone said.

Short said he was honored to be part of a park system that had received such an honor. Staff members in his department have seen a significant increase in the use of the park in recent years, he said, possibly due to the city's growing immigrant population.

"Now they (the staff) see that reemergence of what their youth was, when people really hung out in the park," he said.

Roefaro said the city plans to hold its Fourth of July celebrations at T.R. Proctor Park this year in honor of its 100th anniversary.

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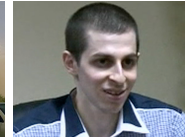
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