

Lashbrook Park Woodland Trail Project

Environmental Studies 399, Spring 2011

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Purpose:

The purpose of our project was to build an accessible trail through the woods in Lashbrook Park with the future option of connecting it to the retirement community on the North side of the property. In doing this, we hoped to enable and encourage the interaction between nature and the community. Our learning objectives included understanding all the processes involved in making decisions on a city scale, from the city government to the park board to the Friends of Lashbrook Park group and how they all interact, as well as learning about mapping, planning a trail, and on-site building experience.

Process:

- ✦ Initial survey of site, development of ideas for path.
- ✦ Meet with Erica Zweifel (community partner) and Friends of Lashbrook Park to discuss project goals and plans.
- ✦ Development of path proposal.
- ✦ Presentation of proposal to Northfield Park and Recreation Board for approval and suggestions.
- ✦ Work with the city on site to implement proposed path, including marking path, and coordinate with other volunteer groups.
- ✦ On site work including clearing of path and spreading of mulch.
- ✦ Development of future plans for use by Friends of Lashbrook Park and St. Olaf Environmental Studies Department.



Lashbrook Park - Woodland Trail



Future Steps and Proposals:

- ✦ Trail upkeep, re-mulching as needed.
- ✦ Connect NE corner of trail to apartment complex and retirement community.
- ✦ Replant native tree and other plant species that were cleared during path implementation.
- ✦ Sitting area near wetland.
- ✦ Interpretive signage or information on species found in Lashbrook Park.



Acknowledgements:

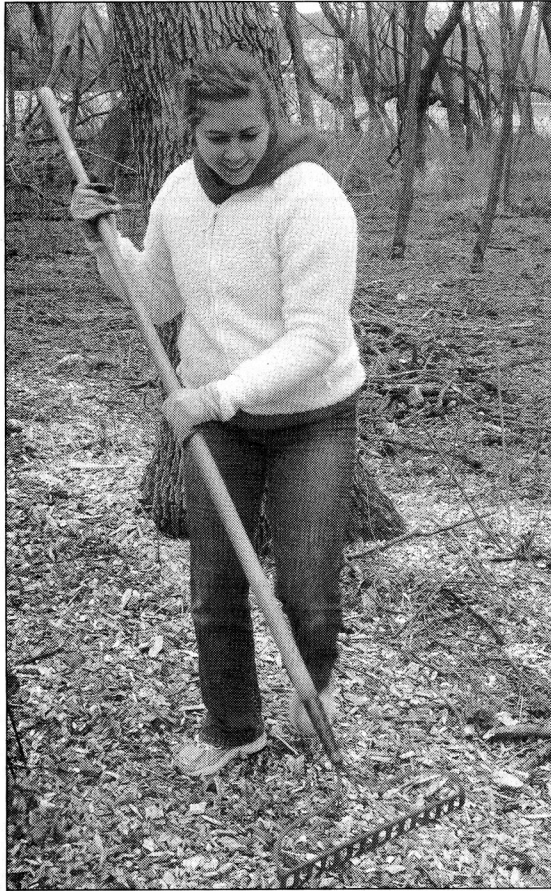
A special thank you to:

- ✦ Erica Zweifel
- ✦ TJ Heinricy, City of Northfield
- ✦ Friends of Lashbrook Park
- ✦ Gloria Kiester
- ✦ St. Olaf Biology Department
- ✦ St. Olaf Social Work Class SWRK 261
- ✦ Northfield Park and Recreation Board
- ✦ Nathan Knutson
- ✦ Paul Jackson and the Environmental Studies Senior Capstone

Challenges:

- ✦ Weather constrictions.
- ✦ Avoiding wetland area, being conscious of topography when planning trail.
- ✦ Adjusting plans to participating parties' interests and views.
- ✦ Working successfully with all parties involved, communicating with all interest groups.
- ✦ Incorporating safety concerns at the park.
- ✦ Obtaining supplies with no budget and coordinating volunteers groups.





News photo by Isabelle Wattenberg

Jackie Scheele spreading woodchips onto the path that runs through the wood in Lashbrook Park.

► GET INVOLVED

What: Attend the Walk in Lashbrook Park

When: From 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Wednesday (today)

Who: Northfield residents are invited to visit the park to explore its native grasses and wildlife. Tours of the park will be provided by St. Olaf students.

Lashbrook Park: passive park energizes Northfield community

By ISABELLE WATTENBERG
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Sometimes, au natural is the way to go.

Supporters of Lashbrook Park on Highland Avenue, which offers about 11 acres of native prairie grass, are embracing this concept. The group Friends of Lashbrook Park, formed in 2008 to protect and maintain the park, has enlisted the help of community members including St. Olaf College students, Knecht's Nurseries, the city government and Northfield residents, to enhance the park's natural features. Projects include planting trees, creating a path through the park's northern woods area and putting up a new park sign.

Lashbrook Park has benefited from community support since its 1991 establishment, funded by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development with additional funds from the city and donations from St. Olaf and Northfield residents. Its establishment arose from efforts by nearby residents to keep an apartment complex off the land. Residents have since protected the park from hosting

a baseball field, tennis courts and an archery range.

The park is a passive park, according to Gloria Kiester, president of Friends of Lashbrook Park, offering paths and benches, but no playground equipment or sports areas.

"It was developed as a passive park where people can come to refresh their souls," she said. "It's a park for all people and all seasons."

And all kinds of people are contributing to the park's natural habitat. Two years ago, an Eagle Scout built and installed several benches in the park. Leif Knecht of Knecht's Nurseries planted more than 200 trees last fall. The city government is helping with the current project, sending workers to clear brush under the direction of TJ Heinrich, Northfield's street and park supervisor.

St. Olaf students studying social work or environmental studies have been working to develop the new path this semester, designing the trail, weeding the area and picking up garbage. Erica Zweifel, research assistant at St. Olaf and City Council member whose district includes the park, is directing the environmental

studies students. She said the project enables students to get out of the classroom and apply what they have learned in the classroom in a practical setting.

"It's really important to give the students the opportunity to test drive what they're interested in," she said.

The students agree. Lisa De Guire, a senior at St. Olaf, said she enjoys the hands-on experience.

"We all chose this project because most of our environmental experiences have been non-action based," she said. "It's been a way to get our hands dirty."

While the environmental studies students are connecting with the earth, the social work students are able to connect to the community. According to Naurine Lennox, associate professor of Social Work at St. Olaf, they are developing a website for Friends of Lashbrook Park in order to encourage community awareness and support of the park.

The park boasts 14 native grasses and more than 40 types of wildflowers, including prairie smoke, alumroot and coneflowers, according to Friends of Lashbrook Park member Fred Stanley.

The grasses reach five to 12 feet high during the summer, welcoming wildlife including deer, pheasants and bluebirds.

Despite the park's popularity with wildlife and nearby residents, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board has the park designated as undeveloped, according to Zweifel.

"We don't feel it's undeveloped," said Zweifel. "We feel it's developed as a prairie."

Lloyd Harkness is Lashbrook Park's caretaker and a Northfield resident since 1935.

"My great grandchildren have walked through the park," he said. "I go to the park just to sit on the benches and admire the country."

Zweifel said she not only appreciates the visual and practical aspects of the path being formed, but she hopes the project will serve as an example for future community projects.

"I feel like this has been a model project for a way to work collaboratively with a bunch of groups," she said. "I hope we have many more projects like this."

— Reach Intern Isabelle Wattenberg at 645-1110.

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Thanks for Lashbrook Park's facelift

By *Jerry Smith*

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To the editor:

On May 17, the ribbon across the new woodland trail in Lashbrook Park was cut and now The Friends of Lashbrook Park would like to thank those who made the trail and beautified the Park.

Erica Zweifel, Counselor for Northfield's Third Ward and the trail's cheerleader-in-chief, interested St. Olaf Environmental Studies majors Mary Morris, Mary Coulson, Lisa DeGuire, and Katelyn DeRuyter in constructing the woodland trail for their community service project. In March she helped them don snow shoes and plot the design and in April they returned with Naurine Lennox's Social Work students to pick up trash.

Then TJ Heinrich, Northfield Street and Parks Supervisor, and his crew cleared the brush, the students finished the trail and the Social Work students informed residents about it and hosted tours of the Park.

Special thanks are also due to Lloyd Harkness and Fred Stanley, who each have spent more time than all the rest together doing whatever needs doing.

Another significant provider is Leif Knecht, whose nursery planted more than 250 trees and shrubs chosen for their beauty in all seasons. In addition to Knecht's generous contributions, money came from donations that had been in City accounts more than 10 years because no one followed through to see that the funds were used as intended.

Meanwhile Prairie Restorations keeps the prairie in prime condition by burning it every few years with flames leaping 30 feet high in the middle of the park, but so low on the edges no trees or homes are endangered. In the spring the prairie flowers return and by fall the billowing auburn grass towers 10 to 12 feet.

Recently someone gazing at the prairie and the woods, the prairie trail, the bluebird trail, the woodland trail and the great sky over it all said, "Lashbrook Park is going to be Northfield's most beautiful park." The reply was, "It already is."

The Mission Statement for Lashbrook Park states that it is a passive park for all people in all seasons to enjoy nature and refresh their souls. Those who wrote that were thinking of children, too.

Children have played in the woods for years, but some of them also like tall grass, clouds and birds and animals and insects -- like the two boys who spent more than two hours there one gorgeous afternoon, squatting, looking, reaching, grabbing, and crawling. This is where future poets and biologists are made.

Gloria J. Kiester and The Friends of Lashbrook Park
Northfield

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