

Anchorage's park system needs you

Compass: Points of view from the community

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The lasting contributions of those who helped provide Anchorage with our 10,000 acres of parkland, trails, sport fields and open space will be celebrated Saturday with Park Founders Day at Cuddy Family Midtown Park.

Generations before us had a vision and recognized the value of parks. They contributed land, money, time and energy and gave us the incredible park system we have today.

Now, we have a responsibility to future generations to continue the vision and support parks by leaving a legacy of a strong, vibrant and financially sound park system.

The Park Foundation has received more than \$728,000 in grants and pledges. Our first grant was in December 2004 when the Rasmuson Foundation contributed \$400,000 to the Park Foundation for capital improvements to parks and trails and grants to community councils for volunteer supplies.

The community rose to the challenge of accepting the grant and undertook a rigorous process of identifying projects to fulfill the grant's mission. The five new park districts involved citizens within those districts and those citizens made recommendations for projects within their respective districts.

The result is the initiative we are calling "Clean & Green and Safe & Secure."

Along with the Rasmuson gift, funds from the Anchorage Park Foundation, Anchorage Parks and Recreation, other sources of funding and use of volunteers will result in \$1 million of improvements to key high-need parks and trails in each of the five park districts for 2005 and 2006.

This will include \$250,000 in city funds to augment the budgets of park maintenance, horticulture and community works services for the increased services provided.

Volunteers, park maintenance, horticulture, community works service and private contractors will be used to do the work.

Volunteers in parks and on the trails are signs of an involved community and vibrant system. We expect the equivalent of \$50,000 worth of volunteer time and will highlight community involvement and results in this high-profile campaign.

Volunteers give their time and energy to make our parks, trails and fields safer and cleaner for everyone to enjoy. Their commitment and

dedication result in better stewardship of all our facilities, and a better community in which to live, work and raise a family.

Volunteers alone cannot maintain or build the quality parks and recreation services required to meet the growing needs of our community.

If we are to succeed in developing a quality park system, cooperation between all of the various park user groups, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Begich administration and the Anchorage Assembly is vital.

It will also take a personal financial commitment from members of the community, which could support specific park projects through contributions to the Park Foundation.

In addition, the various user groups have a responsibility and obligation to help provide funding for individuals who may be left out of a particular activity because of family economic circumstances.

My question to members of the community is: Where is your personal financial commitment and philanthropic support to help programs you deem important to your family and the community?

With strong leadership, individual financial support and nurturing a strong network of volunteers, Anchorage can and will develop and build a strong, financially sound, efficiently managed and healthy park system.

Support our parks with your time, energy and money, and we will leave a legacy for future generations.

Victor Mollozzi is an executive officer at Northrim Bank, the chairman of the Anchorage Park Foundation and the chair of the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission.

The Anchorage Park Foundation invites the community to Park Founders Day from 1-3 p.m. Saturday in Cuddy Family Midtown Park, located behind the Loussac Library. The celebration focuses on Anchorage families and individuals who started our park system and the creation of the newly formed Anchorage Park Foundation.