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Buy a gift for a park

Foundation publishes catalog for supporters to help city parks

The nonprofit Anchorage Park Foundation has published a catalog of amenities people can buy as gifts for city parks. Though the catalog reads like a gift list for the man or woman who has everything, it's truly a wish list for parks that often need more of everything.

The pricey list of gift suggestions include \$3,000 bike racks, \$3,300 benches, \$5,200 picnic tables, \$3,200 trail markers and \$3,375 spring-mounted toys (ducks and ponies).

And, for those with a bigger budget for gifts, there is the Cuddy Family Midtown Park where you buy a promenade for \$50,000, a "Great Lawn" for \$500,000, or a playground for \$225,000.

The equipment prices don't seem so high when you consider they include shipping, installation and about a year's worth of maintenance. And Nancy Beardsley, volunteer coordinator for city Parks and Recreation, points out that park and playground equipment is expensive -- especially with rising prices of wood and steel. She also says the foundation is going for more expensive, higher-quality items that will be cheaper to maintain and last longer -- better long-term investments.

Still, it's fortunate for those of us who appreciate Anchorage parks within more modest means that the catalog also includes long-sleeve T-shirts for \$25, zipper-pulls for \$5 and a 16-ounce Nalgene water bottle for \$15. All with Anchorage Parks logos, and all helping to raise money for parks.

The purpose of the Anchorage Park Foundation is to create a private fund to help pay for park maintenance and improvement. The Rasmuson Foundation has pledged a dollar-for-dollar matching grant of up to \$400,000 for special projects selected in 2006 -- a match that will cover the sweat equity of volunteers too. So you don't have to buy a \$5,200 picnic table to contribute to Anchorage parks.

Last year, the foundation's Clean and Green, Safe and Secure program to fix up city parks drew 1,068 volunteers who donated 4,428 hours.

Ms. Beardsley says all donations of cash, time, skills and sweat are welcome. Sponsoring groups and philanthropic organizations may be more likely to cover some of the big-ticket items, but small donors and a dedicated volunteer force are just as necessary for the health of the parks.

Anchorage has plenty of parks to care for -- 200 parks and 250 miles of trails and greenbelts make up more than 10,000 acres of municipal parkland. Tens of thousands of us, from seniors to toddlers, use them.

Whether we contribute a pavilion, a T-shirt, or vote yes on a park bond, we all can support our parks. They belong to all of us.

BOTTOM LINE: Anchorage Park Foundation can use help from all of us. Call 343-4492 or 343-4288, or go online at www.AnchorageParkFoundation.org.

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