

Big Picture  Local Focus
Daily Herald
SUBURBAN CHICAGO'S INFORMATION SOURCE

Lake Villa parks classes booming; rec center needed

By Lee Filas
Daily Herald Staff Writer
Posted Saturday, April 15, 2006

It appears the grassroots effort that led to creation of the Lake Villa parks program is starting to take hold.

When the program began in 2004, there were only 30 people enrolled in two classes and the department only took in \$800 in revenue.

Two years later, the winter season drew more than 300 people and added more than \$17,000 in revenue.

"We've grown with leaps and bounds, it seems like," said Richard Coles, head of the parks program. "And, we could be doing better if we didn't run out of space. I mean, we've used up every space possible out here for classes and programs. It's so bad that we've had to turn people away."

Help with that problem is about two years away.

The parks department plans to open a 25,000-square-foot recreation center on 50 acres of the Lehman Mansion property on Route 83, Coles said.

The building, which will house most if not all the park programs, will cost about \$3 million, he said.

He added the first \$1.5 million will be obtained through a municipal building bond, while the remaining \$1.5 million will be generated through various fundraisers.

"We would try to use grants to pay for it, but state and federal grants for stuff like this are dwindling," he said. "So, instead, we will go for it ourselves."

Coles said the highlight of the rec center will be a Busy Brains Children's Museum.

The not-for-profit museum was founded in 2003 and is designed with interactive exhibits for children 10 and younger.

"They will be building a 12,000-square-foot space either attached or next to our building," he said. "We aren't exactly sure how it will all work out at this point because we are still in negotiations and dealing with an architect for the building."

Coles hopes to have the recreation center open by late 2007 or in the spring of 2008.

"We've already had a lot of people step up and contribute to this project," he said. "I'm absolutely amazed at how large this has grown. But I'm so happy the people of Lake Villa and the surrounding communities have supported it like they have."
