

Fixing Up Our Park in Shinglehouse

By Deborah C. Resig, Secretary/Treasurer, Shinglehouse Borough

The ladies of the Honeoye Valley Temperance Assembly probably did not have community forestry in mind when they moved their summer encampment to Shinglehouse's park in 1907. It was more likely that they and their families were in need of a pleasant site, near a rail line, with lots of shade to hold their meetings where they preached the evils of the "demon rum." However worthy those goals, by 1984 the preaching auditorium was gone, the tents had been struck, the rail line was but a memory, and the shade trees were on the down side of maturity. It was at this time that the Shinglehouse Borough Council decided to "fix up our park."

To begin our project, the borough used money from a small timber sale taken from the Cole Memorial Forest. The forest was given to the borough in October 1947 by Dr. Harold Newton Cole and Hazel Knapp Cole. Building materials were bought and volunteers organized to begin the task. The end results were two small picnic pavilions, playground swings, horseshoe pits, and a volleyball court. With the help of volunteers, Assembly Park was back in business!

In 1988, much to the chagrin of the park committee, the Pennsylvania Electric Company removed eight sugar maples that lined the front of the park and endangered transmission lines. After much hand wringing and general complaining, an enlightened council member suggested the borough should contact a forester to assess

the health of the remaining trees. To this end, the borough enlisted the help of Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry Service Forester Stan Hess. From that time on the Let's Fix Up the Park Committee had a more worthy calling: the reestablishment of the Shinglehouse community forest.

First, Stan made us aware that, while the park may be our initial concern, the ultimate goal was the entire borough. He began an inventory of the park's remaining trees, which, while a little long on tooth, included quite a diversity of northern Pennsylvania trees. He then assisted us with the structuring of the Borough Shade Tree Commission, including its by-laws and associated ordinances. The following summer, with his guidance and a computer, we completed a comprehensive street tree inventory in the borough. Up to this

time, most of us had appreciated the benefits of trees, but conducting an inventory made us much more aware of the tree varieties and their health. Of course, the downside of the work was notifying property owners of their unhealthy trees and our suggestions for remediating the problems. Thanks to a Potter County CDBG grant, the park committee also kept the park renovation moving along with the building of a large pavilion and a basic restroom at the site of the old auditorium. Summer park reservations jumped from three in 1988 to ninety-eight in 1990.

In 1991 Stan made us aware of a matching fund program, Penn ReLeaf, for the replacement of community trees. That winter Oswago Valley elementary enrichment students conducted an Adopt A Tree Program that provided most of the matching funds for the tree planting grant. In the spring, town residents witnessed the planting of nine maples, seven crabapples, and six rhododendrons in the park. In 1992 the Pennsylvania Electric Company (not such bad guys after all), the Bureau of Forestry, and Penn State University School of Forest Resources donated 50 balled-and-burlapped tree lilacs through the Municipal Tree Restoration Program, or MTRP. During a rainy three day weekend volunteers from the boy scouts, fire department, and borough employees planted the small growing trees under power lines bordering Shinglehouse streets. The volunteers experienced tough but rewarding and educational work, and the tree recipients were extremely pleased with their new street



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trees. Today, the fifty tree lilacs, plus ten others which residents bought through the borough's street tree purchasing and planting program, still bloom along borough streets.

In 1992-93 the park committee was fortunate to receive an RIRA grant for the development of two more acres in the lower park, land that was donated in 1969 by Harold and Helen Olson. On this land volunteers completed a large pavilion, six regulation horseshoe pits, and another volleyball court, all of which are handicap accessible. During the same period the tree committee worked with Stan and John Beauchamp, Penn State Extension Urban Forester, to secure an America The Beautiful grant. The resulting grant netted us 14 trees including honeylocust, sugar maples, littleleaf lindens, and Callery pears. These were planted along school sidewalks and throughout borough parks and ballfields. This time our volunteers were from the Potter County Court System's Community Service Program, which we have used for the past ten years. The young men must have sensed a real purpose in their work this time, because the job was well done.

Since 1994 Shinglehouse has celebrated Arbor Day and has been recognized as a Tree City USA. The initial celebration was a somewhat limited affair attended by a few dignitaries, students, and scouts who gave a proclamation and planted a honeylocust, donated by the Potter County Conservation District. Today, our Arbor Day festivities have grown into an event attended by many of the same dignitaries, the entire Oswayo Valley fourth grade, high school advanced biology students, families and friends who have donated trees, local scouts, clients from the Adult Day Care Center, borough officials, the media, and "our" state forester. The ceremony includes the reading of an Arbor Day proclamation, educational activities, and tree planting. This is followed by the advanced biology class members taking small groups of visitors on an educational tour of the parkland and the adjacent interpretive trail. The half-day program has developed into an excellent way to build an environmental commitment on the part of our students and citizens.

Since 1996 the tree committee has offered a Tree Memorial program in which

a family may donate a tree in memory of a deceased family member. Included in the price of the donation is tree delivery, planting, future care, and a small plaque. This program is under the supervision of a local Penn State Master Gardener as part of his volunteer activities. Seven more trees were added to the park by the program in 1999.

From 1993 to 1995 the borough applied for and received two grants. The first grant was a RIRA grant to acquire 31.4 acres of adjacent parkland that included the beautiful Oswayo Creek, which would be used to develop a nature preserve. The second RIRA/DER grant was used for materials to complete the trail. Thus, our community forest was taking on a new direction, again under the long-term direction of "our" state forester, Stan Hess.

The first step in the trail was for the park committee and forester to mark a trail through a virtual jungle of brush that made up the 32 acres of wetlands. That summer



the "Potter County Trail Busters" under the supervision of the Probation Department blazed the 1.3-mile trail. In addition, Mr. Bruce Kemp's OVHS advanced biology class developed a 0.3-mile interpretative trail within the larger trail, aptly called The Skunk Cabbage Interpretive Trail. The students also worked during the following school year on an educational pamphlet, which is available at the trail entrance. Both trails were dedicated during our Arbor Day celebration in 1996.

In 1997 the borough used their RIRA/DER grant for materials to build six bridges over abandoned mill races, a study-picnic pavilion by Oswayo Creek (an incredibly beautiful setting), six benches, and signage which included trail signs and tree identification markers for the nature trail. For the past three years the trail has been used by our high school students for

Things we are thankful for:

- The help of a good urban forester willing to guide, educate, and work with novices.
- A small core of dedicated tree and park people.
- A long term plan, a comprehensive tree inventory, and a good ordinance.
- Knowledge of, application for, and the good fortune to obtain grants.
- A community and school district willing to support Tree City USA work and Arbor Day celebrations.

environmental studies in preparation for the Potter County Envirothon, and cross-country skiing for physical education classes. In addition, it receives high usage by citizens wishing the solitude of a walk along a beautiful country stream with its picturesque landscape of trees, flowers, and wildlife.

The past two years have been a consolidation period for our community forest because we have not received any new grants. This past summer the tree committee and Stan Hess found it necessary to remove ten declining trees in the park. The tree removals have affected us both financially and emotionally. However, they have challenged us to develop our park and community forest for future generations.

We are hoping to receive other grants for the continued development of our street program. Residents who see the tree lilacs bloom in early summer always ask how to get trees just like them. Of course, human nature being what it is, they probably appreciate the grant part of the tree planting deal.

Over the years we have not always been successful in our park and community forest work, but with the continued help of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, the involvement of the tree committee, and the community we have done things that would have certainly pleased the ladies of the Honeoye Valley Temperance Assembly. While writing of our past accomplishments it's been easy to focus on our successes. The fact is, it was probably three steps forward and one step backward from the beginning of our endeavor and, for that reason, it's been good to work with people who are always available and not easily discouraged by the backward step.