



The Power of a Park

On a spring Sunday afternoon, 65 neighbors gathered for an annual picnic in Belle Meade's only pocket park. For decades it has been the focal point of a neighborhood comprising Deer Park Drive, Deer Park Circle and Jackson Boulevard.

On November 24, 1987, Mr. and Mrs. Manuel M. Eskind donated to the City a portion of land along West Deer Park Circle. On December 9, 1987, Mr. and Mrs. Lucius E Burch, III, did the same with a portion of land along East Deer Park Circle. The two families thus created a park that extends more than 350 feet from Jackson Boulevard to Deer Park Circle.

The park has been a force in nurturing a cohesive neighborhood for people living in 72 homes. Ann Marie McNamara maintains a list of family members and contact information. This list makes neighbors more accessible, and makes it possible to organize community-building events such as the annual picnic.

At this year's picnic we welcomed two new families, and remembered those who are no longer with us. We feasted on homegrown pickled okra and lemon cake. Standing in the blocked-off street, we connected with new friends and caught up with old ones while children played on the grass. The simple act of walking to a social gathering and converging from several directions sets a tone of connectedness, and helps to combat isolation.

I'm grateful for the volunteers who have kept this tradition alive for so long. In recent years those organizers were Marguerite Fish and Nants Reynolds; Virginia Waddey; Jackie Hicks and Rene Poe; and Lara Derryberry and Angie Lowe.

The park has been maintained mostly as green space by the City over the years. The narrow northern end of the park, fronting on Jackson Boulevard, is planted with trees, shrubs, and annual flowering plants. This beautification is supported by contributions to the Society of Ceres, and it provides pleasure to those passing by on foot or in a vehicle.

In March 2017, Weed Wrangle volunteers spent several hours cleaning up the park and uprooting destructive invasive plants. This was the first time this type of cleanup had taken place here. In 2018, the City received a state grant to plant three trees to replace

four large ones lost to storm damage and root rot. The three new trees were planted last fall near the Jackson Boulevard end of the park. These trees will eventually provide a beautiful tree canopy and seasonal interest in the form of flowers (tulip poplar), color (red maple) and bark texture (lacebark elm).

-- Lisa Ellis, Society of Ceres committee member (With special thanks to City Manager Beth Reardon for researching the history and evolution of this little haven)