

SHELBY TOWNSHIP

Shelby Township readies to officially open new park

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A once-controversial site in Shelby Township is about to officially take on new life.

Gene Shepherd Park, developed on the site of the old Soccer City complex near 23 Mile and Dequindre roads, will open officially June 1.

The park is named after former Shelby Township Fire Chief Gene Shepherd, who died two years ago after a battle with cancer. Shepherd enjoyed a 25-year career with the Shelby Township Fire Department, the last three as chief.

"This has really been a collaborative effort between the Board of Trustees and (the parks and recreation committee)," said Michael Flynn, township treasurer who serve as the board of trustees' liaison to the committee. "This has been a long time coming and we are very excited to finally be able to showcase the finished park to the public."

While residents have used portions of the park for several months, the township is applying "a couple of cosmetic finishing touches" in anticipation of the formal

opening, Flynn said.

When completed, Gene Shepherd Park will feature a covered pavilion, tennis courts, sand volleyball courts, Bocce ball courts, horseshoe pits, a soccer field and indoor restrooms.

The park also is in proximity to Yates Cider Mill and several walk/bike paths.

"I'm sure our Shelby families will have lots of fun there," Flynn said.

The property was shrouded in controversy and legal entanglement after the township and a private organization called Soccer City reached a lease deal in 2005.

Under former Supervisor Ralph Maccarone, the township agreed to lease the land and the right to operate a soccer complex for 25 years to Soccer City. In exchange, Soccer City promised to invest \$3.5 million to improve the land. But less than a year after the deal was approved by the Board of Trustees, problems surfaced.

Township officials accused Soccer City of violating provisions of the agreement and for damaging wetlands at the site. By 2008, the agreement was terminated.

Eventually, the township paid Soccer City \$1 million,

in part as reimbursement for improvements to the property, and the wetlands issues were resolved with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Once the legal hurdles were removed, township officials renamed the property to honor the former fire chief and committed up to \$450,000 to renovate the property into a park. Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said the moniker is an appropriate tribute to Shepherd, who strove for cooperation.

"When we initially named the park ... I knew it was a fitting tribute to a great man and leader in our community," the supervisor said. "But, after seeing the high-level of cooperation between various departments such as parks and recreation and

the township engineer, I can think of no better tribute to Chief Shepherd.

"A hallmark of his time here and his continuing legacy was the chief's ability to work with other departments and the board (of trustees) to get the most from every dollar and effort for the township and its taxpayers. Hopefully, as generations of families enjoy that beautiful park, his legacy of proactive leadership and cooperation will live on just as long."

The Shelby Township Parks and Recreation Committee will host a grand opening celebration from noon to 3 p.m. June 1. The family oriented event will include a DJ, games and educational activities for children and adults.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A covered pavilion and walking paths are among the amenities at Shelby Township's new Gene Shepherd Park.

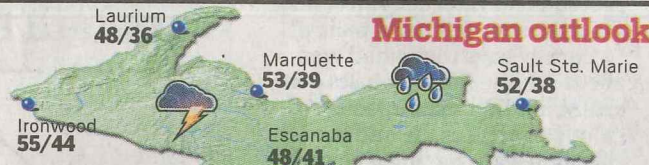
WEATHER

FIVE-DAY FORECAST FOR OAKLAND AND MACOMB COUNTIES

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2014



TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
65 51	79 59	74 54	71 48	72 53
Mostly cloudy with a t-storm	Warmer with variable clouds	Overcast, a t-storm; breezy	Chance of a shower	Partly sunny



ALMANAC

Pontiac through 4 p.m. yesterday

Temperature

High/low	60/36
Normal high/low	65/43
Record high	87 in 1949
Record low	25 in 1968

Precipitation