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Whitt gift to help purchase sculptures, enhance Meadowbrook entrance

A \$75,000 donation to the Urbana Parks Foundation from Urbana residents Dixie and Greg Whitt will be used to purchase two sculptures for the Urbana Park District's Wandell Sculpture Garden in Meadowbrook Park and to enhance the Race Street entrance to the park.

The gift will purchase the two sculptures, "Diamonds Are Forever" and "Open" by Pat McDonald, as well as provide funds to design and construct a Meadowbrook Park Gateway Interpretive Panel for the park entrance.

Dixie and Greg live next door to Meadowbrook Park in Clark-Lindsey Village and walk through the park every day. They say that the gifts were "well worth it, because the sculptures are creative and attractive. On any given day, people surround [the "Diamonds Are Forever" sculpture]... we've even seen people get engaged right there!"

The Whitts have been strong supporters of the Urbana Parks Foundation and the Urbana Park District for many years. Dixie Whitt served on UPDAC, the Urbana Park District Advisory Committee, in the late 1990s and has served on the board of the Urbana Parks Foundation since 2015.

Foundation President Fred Delcomyn observed, "This most recent gift is among the largest received by the relatively young Foundation. It will ensure that two beloved sculptures in the Wandell Sculpture Garden can be enjoyed by many generations of park visitors."

He continued, "A new interpretive element at the Race Street entrance will also allow both new and returning visitors to the park to gain an even better appreciation of what the park has to offer."

Delcomyn noted that by making the gift to the Foundation, Dixie and Greg made possible a flexible acquisition schedule over several years that was preferred by the sculptor's family. Once fully acquired by the Foundation, ownership of the sculptures will be transferred to the Urbana Park District. In the meantime, the sculptures will remain where they are for all to enjoy. "The sole mission of the Urbana Parks Foundation is to provide financial and other support to the Park District," Delcomyn said. "Setting up flexible arrangements such as was done in this case is one way we can do that."

The Urbana Park District has been planning an interpretive program at Meadowbrook Park for some time. Thousands of visitors come to Meadowbrook Park every year. Interpreting the natural landscape of the park to visitors is a goal that an earlier small gift from the Whitts helped achieve.

Tim Bartlett, Executive Director of the Urbana Park District, remarked that he is “thrilled that we are able to update the panels at the Freyfogel overlook to replace the very first interpretive elements at Meadowbrook Park. This ties into our other longer term goals at Meadowbrook Park to provide more coordinated interpretive services in that park.” He added that the Whitt’s gift demonstrates that the Urbana Park District has “come a long way from tossing prairie seeds into the soil, stamping them in with our feet to now celebrating our educational programs in our parks.”

The Wandell Sculpture Garden at Meadowbrook Park was dedicated in June 1999. The garden was named in honor of Celia and Willet Wandell, who owned a local plant nursery and established a trust to give trees to neighboring communities. The Wandells saw the Urbana Park District’s plans for a sculpture garden in Urbana as a way to both honor their parents and support art in a natural setting.

Several of the garden’s sculptures are owned by the Urbana Park District as part of the permanent collection. Most of the artwork are on a two-year loan from the artist and are available for purchase.

To learn more about The Urbana Parks Foundation and to make a tax-deductible donation please visit www.urbanaparksfoundation.org.