
PROLOGUE

All Fixed Up and Looking Fine With a Little Help from Our Friends

A year ago at this time, *Sooner Magazine* carried an article about the most ambitious volunteer effort ever attempted at the University of Oklahoma — and in many ways, the least likely to succeed. A group of “friends” were renovating the old Duck Pond, working evenings and weekends, using borrowed heavy equipment, donated materials and the sweat of volunteer labor, some even supplying their own hand tools.

Normally, we avoid publicizing a project in its infant stage, preferring to wait for its successful completion. In this instance, however, these poor quixotic souls, dubbed “The Friends of the Duck Pond,” were tearing up a piece of historic Sooner real estate, and fall is a time when out-of-towners who love this University are apt to drop by. They might have mistaken good intentions for wanton destruction of an area dear to Sooner hearts — an area already under assault from encroaching athletic department facilities to the west and the world’s ugliest parking lot on the north.

Then too, in the process of reassuring our public, we frankly hoped that there might be those in our reading audience who would give these folks

a hand, physically or financially, because this undertaking was either going to be a miracle or a monumental fiasco.

We need not have worried. The Friends of the Duck Pond have wrought their miracle. This fall, you can judge for yourself.

Drive down Lindsey Street and look to the north or down Brooks and look south. The ponds (there are three of them) have been dredged, the water surface nearly tripled, the shores cleared of dead and diseased growth, graded, sodded and protected from erosion. The stonework on the bridges has been restored and a new suspension bridge constructed along with several scenic wood and stone viewpoints. The resident ducks (several born while boarding at the rural home of a “Friend” who can only be described as saintly) are safely ensconced on three new habitat islands, free to swim the clean waters and grow fat on bread crumbs while entertaining the kids of all ages who relax there.

The spirit behind this effort was a campus police lieutenant named Richard Hamilton, who didn’t know enough to take “no” for an answer. His fellow OUPD officers formed the nuc-

leus of the group with workers from the OU physical plant supplying many of the special skills required. Forming the rest of the labor force were faculty members, students and townspeople. This wasn’t glamour duty; it was wet and dirty work — wading, digging, planting. Yet they came back for more, evening after evening, weekend after weekend, over 700 of them investing approximately 7,000 of their leisure time hours.

The University’s construction equipment was made available during these off-duty periods. The extremely costly, heavy-duty equipment, however, came on loan from private firms, in one case complete with operator, at a cost conservatively estimated at \$117,000 in actual operating time, not counting time on the site waiting to be used. Another \$20,000 in materials, directly donated or purchased with donated funds, went into the project.

To many the crowning feature is the new fountain, a geyser of water propelled 40 feet into the air by an underwater pump specially adapted for the purpose. While circulating the water and keeping the ponds from stagnating, the fountain also is just plain fun.

The Friends are not disbanding, now that their initial task is complete. Several items remain on their shopping list which were simply beyond their means — an irrigation system to support new trees and other landscaping away from the shoreline; restroom facilities; adequate lighting for safety and security purposes; and permanent surfacing for the fitness circuit.

Periodic volunteer clean-up days also will be held to keep the Duck Pond in its wonderfully restored condition, hopefully never again to fall victim to the neglect that threatened its 50-year existence. So, careless picnickers and vandals beware; these folks are not to be taken lightly. Nobody messes with their Duck Pond. —CJB

