

Park to honor Westerville's ties to history

By Gary Budzak

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WESTERVILLE — The city has a property on the Delaware County line that it will use to honor the area's past as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

The half acre of what will become a park is at the northwest corner of Africa Road and Polaris Parkway. It will be along Sycamore Trail.

"The Sycamore Trail development will feature symbolic elements including a shallow, stream-like water feature, the Big Dipper star constellation, information panels and an installation representing the North Star," said the Westerville Community Recreation Guide's March/April issue. "The development will be rounded out with a wetland feature, gathering spaces, seating, overlooks and landscaping."

The main attraction, though, will memorialize the Underground Railroad.

This was not an ancient subterranean transportation system, but rather a beacon of hope in the time leading up to the U.S. Civil War.

"The Underground Railroad (UGRR) was a metaphor for a large, interconnected network composed of smaller local systems that helped fugitives (runaway slaves) to make their way to freedom by providing money, transportation, food, clothing, other goods, and legal services," said the National Humanities Center in a handout.

"Fugitives, many of whom received no previous formal assistance to escape, reached the UGRR locations in a number of ways, including walking on foot at night, adopting disguises, and hiding on steamboats originating from Southern ports."

All told, 25,000 to 50,000 slaves used the system

to escape to freedom.

Perhaps the bestknown of these is Harriet Tubman, who conducted more than a dozen such forays from Maryland to Canada. The Grio reports Tubman will be on the U.S. \$20 bill in 2030.

Information provided by the Westerville History Museum said there was a village just north called East Orange (present-day Alum Creek Reservoir) connected by what is now Africa Road.

One of the farmers there built several barns that stored not only the harvest and livestock, but also hid people who were formerly enslaved.

More than a dozen former slaves fled North Carolina to East Orange.

For those fleeing by night, points of light in the dark skies helped

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And in Polaris Fashion Place, the Candy Spot is now open on the top level, and IrieJam Island Grill

provide navigation, notably by using Polaris, the North Star.

For more information, visit www.westerville.org/parks and westervillelibrary.org/museum.

Last month, the city began using robotic mowers at the Everal Barn and Homestead. The city notes they are safe, shutting off, and emitting an alarm if touched.

Sadly, K-9 Fiji, the city police division's first female narcotics dog, passed away in April.

In other area news, Gena's Restaurant, 5497 Sunbury Road, closed permanently this spring, after being in business for more than a decade.

The Hilton Columbus Polaris, 8700 Lyra Dr., will have a new 17 Arrows Craft Kitchen & Bar.

The name refers to Ohio being the 17th state admitted into the union and the number of arrows in the state seal. Nearby on Polaris Parkway, a new Blue Agave Mexican restaurant has opened.

(Jamaican and West African cuisine) is now open in the food court.



A drawing of park plans proposed at Polaris Parkway and Africa Road.

Courtesy | City of Westerville