



# Residents, officials hope new park sparks new energy in Wellston

By CAMILLE PHILLIPS · OCT 8, 2016

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*Nathaniel Thompson, 4, plays with his father Duane Thompson on the jungle gym at Trojan Park in Wellston Sat. October 8, 2016.*



People who live in and around Wellston have a new place to gather, play and exercise.

Trojan Park is now open to the public in the north St. Louis County town. It features a playground, exercise equipment, butterfly gardens and the city's first full-length basketball court.

At the grand opening Saturday, the one-acre park at the corner of Skinker Parkway and Etzel Avenue was filled with area residents and dignitaries.

"I think it's beautiful. They've really thought of everything and kids of all ages can use it," said Teena Thompson, who lives in the West End neighborhood of St. Louis on the other side of Skinker. "The only concern I have of course is we've got a couple of nice parks in the neighborhood that we can't use because of other activities."

"There is a park that's about two blocks from our house, but we don't — nobody in our neighborhood ever uses it because of the drug activity and other things that go on over there, so none of the kids really feel safe," Thompson added as her young sons climbed on the jungle gym. "But I think because this park is on such a major street, and it's highly visible I really have a lot of hope that it's going to be a place where it's going to be used for what it was intended for."

During opening ceremonies dignitaries spoke in glowing terms about the effect the park could have on Wellston.

"I can't tell you how much this is impacting me today to come and see this park," said St. Louis County Councilwoman Hazel Erby, D-University City. "When I walked up this morning I could hardly keep from tearing up, it's so wonderful."

"Wellston deserves it. Our children deserve it. Our families deserve it," Erby added. "There are good things happening here. We always hear the negative, today this is just ... a vision of hope."



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*The Jr. NBA, which donated funds for the basketball court at Trojan Park, holds a clinic during the opening ceremonies on Oct. 8, 2016.*

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Wellston Mayor Nathaniel Griffin said the park is the start of a transformation for the city.

“We have a quality community with quality people. We don’t have the quality resources,” Griffin said. “And so those are things that we need to build this community back up. We need digital libraries for advanced education. We need a quality education system for advanced learning.”

The park is named after the mascot of Wellston’s old high school. The Wellston School District was absorbed by Normandy in 2010

(<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/kwmu/news.newsmain/article/0/0/1625116/St..Louis.Public.Radio.New>: because of poor academics. Normandy has been unaccredited since 2013.

Griffin thanked the multitude of donors and vendors that contributed to the park’s construction, then called on investors to continue putting money in Wellston.

He pointed to the success of a Footlocker on Kingshighway and the O’Fallon Recreation Center as signs that businesses and institutions in north St. Louis County can help build community.

“People were saying don’t put that there, they’re going to break into it. It’s the largest selling Footlocker in the country. They said the O’Fallon Recreation Center don’t put it there, people aren’t going to use it. That YMCA is used more than any other YMCA across the country,” Griffin said.





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Wellston Mayor Nathaniel Griffin and Hazel Erby, center, cut the ribbon to celebrate the opening of Trojan Park as representatives from Great Rivers Greenway, the National Recreation and Park Association, donors and vendors surround them on Oct. 8, 2016.

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Asked whether he had any concerns about safety at the park, Griffin said there were security cameras and they were looking into hiring a park ranger or dedicated police officer.

“Statistics show when you build positive things in a community you get positive results,” Griffin added. “We hadn’t ever had an incident happen at any park that’s in Wellston. That’s because it’s a positive place where positive people come.”

the Municipal Park Grant Commission of St. Louis County.

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