

Park offers creek access, playground and ball fields

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Love Grove on the north side of Wilmington has long been known as a tight knit community. An annual picnic brings community members together each year. If strangers are seen in the area, they're usually approached and politely asked if they need any help.

For many years, though, an abandoned landfill created an ugly juxtaposition to such a cheerful neighborhood.

Not any more.

The City of Wilmington will hold a grand opening and ribbon cutting 11 a.m. Saturday at Archie Blue

Community Park, 1306 Stanley St., on the site that used to be piled with decaying paper, dirty plastic and broken bottles.

Mayor Bill Saffo, city public services director Richard King and perhaps a descendant of the park's namesake will speak at the event. Blue lived his entire life in Love Grove and mentored thousands of children in his more than 30 years at the local Community Boys & Girls Club. He is also credited with founding the Community Boys & Girls Club Drum and Bugle Corps, now called the Drum and Drill Team.

"The list of improvements that we made was based on many, many community meetings," Saffo said. "We're implementing what the citizens said they wanted."



Photo by Matt Born

The playground is one of several new additions at Archie Blue Community Park at Love Grove in Wilmington. The grand opening of the park is scheduled for Saturday.

Saffo said he regularly receives requests from citizens for more water access and more walking paths, which are both features of the new park.

After the speeches, the community will come together for a cookout to help break in the new picnic shelter.

There is plenty to celebrate. Going from a landfill to a public park was not easy.

“This project ended up having three different funding sources, which is a little unusual,” said Malissa Talbert, the city's communications manager. “Otherwise it would've just laid fallow and become a blight on the community.”

To meet environmental safety requirements, a huge amount of soil had to be removed from the site and truckloads of new soil brought in. In all, the 6.5 acre park cost \$1.2 million. The money came in part from a \$500,000 Parks and Green Space Bond with a \$268,000 grant from the state. The rest was mustered up through city construction money.

Trash and contamination have been replaced with a baseball/softball field, basketball court, playground with swings, picnic shelter with restrooms and an canoe/kayak put-in area. Archie Blue Park sits alongside Burnt Mill Creek which joins Smith Creek about a half mile north.

Kemp Burdette, executive director of Cape Fear Riverwatch, said he's looking forward to using the access to the creeks, two of the most urban watersheds in town. Excursions from this point will enable better cleanup of the creeks and new educational trips.

According to the first quarterly newsletter, “Love Grove Landfill Brownsfields Assessment,” published by the City of Wilmington, some of the community meetings were video taped and may be used in a short documentary in the near future.

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