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Press Release:

Lion Gate Park Receives an Excellence in Design Award

Township of Bloomfield was presented the Excellence in Design: Athletic Facility Award for Lion Gate Park at the New Jersey Recreation and Park Association (NJRPA) Annual Awards Ceremony at Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center in Atlantic City, NJ on Tuesday, March 14, 2023. Excellence in design awards are presented to public use recreation and park facilities which exhibit aesthetic quality, uniqueness of design, usability, and versatility. Michael Scurman, Director of Bloomfield Recreation and Tom Miller of Miller Associates accepted the award.

Lion Gate Park, located in Bloomfield NJ was created from a former manufacturing site on the edge of two flood-prone tributaries of the Passaic River. Around the year 2000, the 18.2 acre tract was headed for further urban development in an already densely populated area of the town until neighborhood environmental advocacy helped to change the future of this location. After years of negotiations and help from several external groups, the Township was able to acquire the land.

This acquisition was just the beginning of the long haul required to create this neighborhood gem. The remediation of hazardous materials was critical in the development of Lion Gate Park. Restoring the wetlands area involved the excavation and removal of 60,000 cubic yards of historic fill to reestablish original floodplain conditions along the Third River, and the installation of thousands of wetland plants. Not only is Lion Gate now a beautiful public park, but its development also helped reclaim wetlands within an inner ring Essex County community.

The wetland is designed to hold and slowly release floodwater from the Third River, improve water quality within the Passaic River watershed and re-introduce vital urban habitat. Thanks to the construction of the wetland area, the property is no longer at-risk of flooding. These enhancements will also substantially reduce the risk and severity of flooding downstream while working to advance Bloomfield's compliance with New Jersey's strict new stormwater management regulations.

Many issues prolonged the completion of Lion Gate Park. In addition to the time required to correct the environmental concerns of the property, early on the project was halted to remove and replace the original engineering and construction teams. And of course, we all know the Covid pandemic delays were lengthy.

After over 20 years of hard work and anticipation, Lion Gate Park was opened to the public in June Of 2021 as Bloomfield Township's newest natural resource amenity, serving as an active recreational park and environmental restoration. The site contains a multi-use playing field, youth play areas, walking paths, exercise stations and a 950 sq ft field house alongside the new 4.2 acre "created" freshwater wetlands.

Due to the environmental nature of this project, its budget of 13.2 million received support from a range of grants from the NJDEP and Green Acres

The newly developed wetland and park amenities have been enthusiastically received by the local community as well as the region. The Park serves a large cross section of the community and is an oasis in an urban setting. The parks' versatility is demonstrated through comprehensive environmental improvements coupled with passive, and active recreational elements. Lion Gate Park is one of the success stories by transforming a former contaminated Brownfields site and turning into a positive urban resource.

The New Jersey Recreation and Park Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting parks and recreation; enhancing the professional development of its members; advocating sound policy and stewardship related to parks, recreation, resource management, and leisure services; and increasing awareness of the value of play and preservation of the environment to interested citizens and the public.

The purpose of the New Jersey Recreation and Park Association's Awards Program is to honor and identify dedicated leaders, employees, and volunteers in the field of Parks and Recreation, and to recognize the State's outstanding Recreation and Park agencies for excellence in programming, publicity, and facility design. The goal of the Awards Program is to focus State attention on the achievement of Park and Recreation agencies, to recognize the continuing efforts of staff and volunteers, and to acknowledge support extended by member agencies.