

The Houston-Galveston Area Council
Natural Resources Advisory Committee-Parks and
Natural Areas
2007 “Best of the Best” Honors Award



The Houston-Galveston Area Council Natural Resources Advisory Committee-Parks and Natural Areas (PNA) has a mission is to assist in the development of public policy initiatives to expand parks and natural areas in the 13-county H-GAC region. It is comprised of representatives of various local governments, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector and established the Honor Awards Program to highlight best practices and innovative approaches to creating and improving parks and natural areas throughout the region.

The 2007 Best Practices in Parks and Natural Areas Honor Awards competition included these categories: Projects Over \$500,000, Projects Under \$500,000, and Planning. Eight applications were received and scored by the PNA subcommittee. Entries were evaluated on innovation, merit, and regional impact. All were deemed worthy projects and deserve recognition as Best Practices. “Best of the Best” winning entries demonstrated collaboration between developers, architects, engineers, local governments, preservationists, and citizens. Visit www.h-gac.com/PARKS for details.

Jury members for 2007 included Robert L. Rayburn, ASLA, senior project manager for the Energy Corridor District; Rafael Longoria, registered architect and professor at the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture; Kevin Shanley, president of The SWA Group; and last year's award winners, Margaret Robinson, ASLA, principal of Asakura Robinson Company, LLC; and Judson W. Robinson, Deputy Commissioner of Harris County Precinct 2.

The organizations involved have made significant contributions to the planning, acquisition and enhancement of parks and natural areas in the Houston-Galveston region. Together, these projects impact approximately 150 acres and include master plans to double that amount. Submittals include initiatives to restore coastal wetlands to mitigate flooding, integrate natural areas in an urban setting, and develop community urban green space. The H-GAC Board of Directors hosted an Awards presentation and reception on Tuesday, February 19, 2008. This year’s Honor Award recipients are:

PROJECT I CATEGORY: Over \$500,000

HONORS AWARD WINNER

Jim and JoAnn Fonteno Park

Submitter: PageSoutherlandPage, Architects and Engineers
Owner: Harris County Precinct 2

Partners: Stewart Construction, Haynes Whaley Associates, Inc., Structural Engineers, Binkley and Barfield, Inc./MEP Engineering, TSC Engineering Company, Knudson & Associates, Landscape Architects, and Harris County Precinct 2

Location: East Harris County, Precinct 2
Area: 33 acres
Budget: \$2,889,000

The Jim and JoAnn Fonteno Park faced interesting challenges: “design a nature park in a pocket of woods and wetlands fixed squarely in the midst of single family homes, parking lots, and strip-mall development in eastern Harris County.” The park integrated suburban landscape with the traditional park concept.

Rich and varied landscape accommodates programmed activities, pavilion, and decked picnic facilities constructed of recycled material. A loop path trail accesses long views of woods and wide views of clearings and lawns as urban “backyards.” It includes a series of pocket parks that feature bird and butterfly gardens, beautyberry and fern gardens. Fonteno Park “pairs suburbia with nature with the aim of rendering one, if not both, spatial conditions more visible.”

PROJECT II CATEGORY: Under \$500,000

HONORS AWARD CO-WINNERS

Jarboe Bayou Shoreline Restoration Project

Submitter: City of Clear Lake Shores
Owner: City of Clear Lake Shores
Partners: Halff Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and Shell Oil Company

Location: Galveston County, City of Clear Lake Shores
Area: 2.5 acres
Budget: \$316,928

The City of Clear Lake Shores “developed a two-acre park, restored three marsh islands creating almost an acre of wetlands within Jarboe Bayou, and preserved 1,100 linear feet of shoreline.” This wetland doubles the park area of the City.

The project includes an interpretive trail, two kayak launches, two piers for wetland viewing, native plants, and restored “islands” that support *Spartina alterniflora* (Saltmarsh or Smooth Cordgrass) and other wetland vegetation. Plants absorb pollutants through their root systems and trap trash and debris. They also provide a slowing of storm water movement during heavy rain events, protecting the shoreline from further erosion and

degradation. Intertidal fringe grass provide habitat for blue crab, shrimp, and other species associated with sport and commercial fishing in this Gulf Coast region, important to the local economy.

Eleanor Tinsley Elementary School SPARK Park and Nature Center

Submitter: SPARK
Owner: Houston ISD
Partners: Houston ISD, Port of Houston Authority, Marathon Oil Corporation, Fiesta Mart, Inc., M2L Associates, Boy Scouts of America-Sam Houston Area Council, Hewlett Packard, the Farb Foundation, Flagship Properties, Urban Harvest, Museum of Fine Arts-Houston, and Trees for Houston

Location: Harris County, Precinct 3, City of Houston
Area: 2 acres
Budget: \$55,000

This SPARK project converted a detention pond and drainage green space into “a school yard nature center that serves as a haven and sanctuary for native plants and birds, insects, butterflies, and turtles... and a beautiful place to play, observe, and learn for students, staff, and the community.”

There are new fruit trees, a mural, footbridge over the pond, gardens (cacti, butterflies, rocks, and vegetables), crushed gravel walkways and paths, and a tool shed. The community collaboration of students, parents, school staff, and partners has provided an urban oasis for students and the neighborhood.

Tinsley Elementary School, 11035 Bob White, is one of 10 schools built with funds from Rebuild 2002. Tinsley opened in autumn of 2001 and relieved overcrowded conditions at Ralph Anderson and Horace Elrod Elementary Schools. It was named for former City Council member Eleanor Tinsley, who also served on the HISD Board of Education and played a pivotal role in the campus-beautification SPARK (school park) program. (Source: HISD Connect – www.houstonisd.org)

PLANNING CATEGORY

HONORS AWARD WINNER

The Kickerillo Mischer Preserve

Submitter: Friends of the Kickerillo Mischer Preserve
Owner: V&W Partners, Ltd., Developer
Partners: Harris County Precinct 4, V&W Partners, Ltd., HP Park Alliance/ Friends of the Kickerillo Mischer Preserve

Location: Northwest Harris County, Precinct 4

Area: 85 acres initially; master plan for up to 125 acres with a 40-acre lake
Budget: Not yet available

The Kickerillo Mischer Preserve is the culmination of a three-year process of negotiations and collaboration for the acquisition of a naturally pristine 640-acre tract of Hewlett Packard's property along the SH 249/Cypress Creek corridor. A stakeholder group called Friends of the Kickerillo Mischer Preserve developed a plan that proposes to preserve 25 percent of the original tract. The bulk of the 80-acre site, which includes a 40-acre lake, is included in a Master Plan for the property that proposes to explore innovative ways to allow public access to a secure and preserved environment.

Located adjacent to Cypress Creek, this future nature park, valued at over \$6 million, is listed in some historical records as sharing in the journey of Sam Houston's army across northwestern Harris County trailing Cypress Creek, where they camped on the way under the "Old Sam Houston Oak" near present Hwy 249's crossing of Cypress Creek (Resource: CCFCC, Sept 2005).

RECOGNIZED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE REGION: PROJECTS

Seabreeze Environmental Landfill Wetland Project

Submitter: S&B Infrastructure, Ltd.
Owner: Republic Services, Inc.
Partners: Republic Waste Services of Texas, Brazoria Environmental and Recycling Service (BEARS)

Location: Brazoria County, City of Angleton
Area: 6 acres
Budget: \$325,000

Seabreeze Environmental Landfill Wetlands is located at the entrance to the landfill in Brazoria County. It is approximately 4 acres of quality wetlands and 2 acres of adjacent uplands created to mitigate badly degraded wetlands on the property. The wetlands and uplands "create a functional, natural, and aesthetically pleasing green space which may be viewed by visitors to the landfill...."

Elements of art incorporated into the mitigation area design included plan/area texture, colors, form, scale, repetition and focalization" using diverse plant species. Wetlands are essential for water quality enhancement. At Seabreeze, storm water run-off is directed toward the wetlands, which acts as a natural filter for non-point source pollution.

Alice Staub Liddell Garden Project

Submitter: Rice University Department of Facilities, Engineering and Planning
Owner: Rice University
Partners: Lynn R. Lowery Arboretum at Rice University

Location: Harris County, Precinct 1, City of Houston
Acres: 2,500 square feet
Budget: \$73,500

The Alice Staub Liddell Garden was developed by the Lowery Arboretum Committee at Rice University. Its goal is to beautify “an area of the campus’ grounds that had previously lacked definition.” The 2,500 square foot park is a pocket park featuring a gate, walkway, and four benches that augment the centerpiece, a student-designed birdbath. It brings a place of reflection and romance to the campus. Leatherleaf and ferns trace the garden perimeter with dwarf ophiopogon, ligularia denta, and feather palms as central planters.

RECOGNIZED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE REGION: PLANNING

Timber Lane Utility District Master Park Plan

Submitter: Timber Lane Utility District
Owner: Timber Lane Utility District
Partners: Van De Wiele Engineering, Texas A&M University, College of Architecture-Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning

Location: North Harris County, Precinct 4
Area: 17 acres at present; growing to 269 acres along 4 miles of the north side of Cypress Creek
Budget: \$83,000 initially, \$6 million bond funds approved for park development

The Timber Lane Utility District (TLUD) Master Park Plan fits neatly into and supports the proposed Greenway plan along Cypress Creek. The plan allows for “preservation of wooded green space land from housing development,” adds hike and bike trails within the district and connects to adjacent trail systems, and “provides an added quality of life for nature access.”

According to the District, “the ‘best’ part of the planning process was the collaboration generated by the plan and the multiple input sessions conducted” that culminated in the passage of \$6 million in bond funds for parks in the District and acquisition of other adjacent tracts by Harris County for the Cypress Creek Greenway.

North East Water Purification Plant Demonstration Garden Master Plan

Submitter: Jennifer L. Appel, RLA, LI, CSFIA, Landsulpture & Design, Inc.
Owner: City of Houston
Partners: City of Houston, Houston Area Water Corporation, Jennifer's Landscape Vitamins, Inc.

Location: Northeast Harris County, City of Houston
Area: 2 acres
Budget: Not yet available

The Demonstration Garden Master Plan proposes to use surplus land at the North East Water Purification Plant for community education. The demonstration project's master plan pioneers cutting edge technology designed to assist the residential homeowner and is a first for the City of Houston.

Planning visions for this best practice showcase include water efficient landscaping, permaculture designs for landscape, native plant materials, recycling stations, composting, green roof construction, 53 different types of pervious paving alternatives, rain water harvesting, heat island mitigation techniques, and vegetable and herb garden. The plan emphasizes community education and involvement to "alter the 'commonly accepted landscape practices' to create a safer future for our children, pets, and the planet."