

## APRC Starts New Column in the Tidings

Reaching out to and communicating with the citizens of Ashland is an important part of the mission of the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission. We are launching this column to help share information regarding current park projects, recreational programming, parks and open-space features and community issues that pertain to all citizens of Ashland and are of importance to the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission. During 2017 commissioners and park staff will take turns communicating with the community via this monthly column regarding park and community issues and park projects that we feel are worthy of discussion.

As a lead off, please allow me to take a moment to describe the structure and the history of Ashland's Parks & Recreation Commission. Since the early 1900s, events have transpired, votes have been taken and decisions have been made all leading to the building of the parks system that both Ashland residents and visitors enjoy today.

Early on in our local history, the Southern Oregon Chautauqua Association summer sessions, which started in the early 1890s, brought to Ashland the Chautauqua Tabernacle (constructed in the footprint of the present-day OSF outdoor theater) and the beginning of a park-like setting near the downtown Plaza. During the early 1900s, the Chautauqua movement grew in importance, just as the adjacent flour milling business property along Ashland Creek fell into disrepair.

The citizens of Ashland, led by the then-recently created Woman's Civic Improvement Club, requested that the City Council create a real city park on the mill property near the Plaza. Their efforts met with success when, on Dec. 17, 1908, the City Council adopted Article XIX that amended the Ashland city charter and founded what is today known as Lithia Park. The charter amendment established a city-wide parks policy and an elected and independent park commission, as well as a funding mechanism to pay for parks. Now the citizens of Ashland had the beginnings of a parks system.

The amendment called for an elected commission, independent of the City Council, to oversee the business of a parks system. Today, 108 years later, the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission (APRC) continues to operate under the guidance of a five-member elected park commission. With a knowledgeable and dedicated staff, numbering between 40 and 60 individuals depending on the season, APRC provides recreational programming, park and open space maintenance and improvements, a seasonal ice rink, Oak Knoll Golf Course, the Ashland Senior Center, Daniel Meyer Pool, North Mountain Park Nature Center, Calle Guanajuato, Pioneer Hall, Ashland Community Center, the Grove, 19 parks and many miles of multi-use trails to be used by visitors and Ashland citizens alike.

Michael Black leads APRC as Park Director. Michael has been the head of our organization for a little more than two years. As director, he follows a long line of successful park directors from

Chet Corry, Ken Mickelson and Don Robertson to the present-day staff. Rachel Dials is our recreation superintendent, overseeing our recreation programming and many, if not most, of our facilities.

Jeffery McFarland is our interim parks superintendent, taking over for the recently retired Bruce Dickens. Jeff is a 30-something year APRC employee and has possibly covered just about every square foot of park property that Ashland owns. As I noted previously, we feel fortunate to have a dedicated staff that does everything from mowing Siskiyou Boulevard medians, building trails, laying irrigation, picking up trash and cleaning our park restrooms to programming for both children and adult classes, maintaining ice skates, organizing a bike swap and much, much more. It all comes together as one outstanding park system.

In closing, let me say that it is my pleasure to currently serve as the chair of the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission. More than 100 purposeful citizens of Ashland have served terms as Ashland Park Commissioners during the past 100-plus years. Two are currently city councilors. The current commissioners represent more than 40 elected years of service on the commission.

Please be assured that we commissioners and all parks staff are dedicated to providing the best possible experience in parks and recreation for Ashland residents. And I would be remiss if I did not say thank-you to the hundreds of volunteers that give of their time each year to support APRC. If you have questions regarding Ashland Parks & Recreation, please go to the city website and look up APRC and contact us with your questions. I look forward to the next time the commission can share a parks topic with you.

*Mike Gardiner (Chair, Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission)*