



The park that almost wasn't

Carmen Cosentino | Posted: Friday, May 27, 2011 3:05 am

This weekend, St. Joseph School is hosting its second annual Healing Field: Field of Hopes and Dreams event. Last year, nearly 1,100 American flags were in the display at Hoopes Park. Today, a week before the event, a committee person said that they have already sold nearly double that. If you ever have reason, and you shouldn't, to doubt the patriotism of the folks in Auburn, just stop by Hoopes Park this weekend. You will be inspired

History sure does have a way of repeating itself, especially in Auburn. Let's talk about that underappreciated gem in this city that we call Hoopes Park. Yes, it is a gem and it does have a long and colorful past. It all started in the 1920s, when Herman Hoopes wanted to donate a tract of land in the eastern part of Auburn to the city. All he asked was that the area, then the city's rubbish and ash dump (we hadn't invented the word "landfill" yet), be turned into a park, within five years. There were a few minor stipulations on adjoining land that he owned. It took several years of hearings and meetings and arguing (sound familiar) before the deal was finally finished and a park begun. It was a slow and arduous task. An article in the April 15, 1932 Citizen-Advertiser told about "hiring jobless men to grade and improve the grounds beautify the stream that flows through the park."

By the late 1930s, the pond was filled (and rubbish was no longer floating to the top), and a clubhouse completed with a small greenhouse attached for the sowing of seeds to provide plants for the endeavor. In the late '30s, the folks at Jackson & Perkins in Newark, one of America's premiere rose growers and breeders, began furnishing roses for the garden, and it became a beautiful park. People today remember the roses and the beautiful swans they came to feed. Social columns in The Citizen-Advertiser listed dozens of picnics and events held there during the '30s and '40s. By the mid-'50s, neither the roses nor, in fact, Jackson and Perkins were thriving. The trees had grown and provided wonderful shade for picnics and strolling, but sun the roses needed to thrive disappeared. By the end of the decade the park became one large lawn with few flower beds.

The one activity at the park that did thrive from the '30s into the mid-'70s was the pond. It provided some of the best ice skating around. Auburnians could hardly wait for it to freeze over so that the kids could try out the \$5 skates that Santa brought. And then came Casey Park, another wonderful asset for the city. As I remember, it was to cost about \$700,000, of which the federal and state governments would provide 90 percent. It took nearly three years to get past all the reasons brought up by the naysayers. Why are we always against any changes that might enhance our community?

At about the same time there was a resurgence of interest. Some trees were cut and new beds planted with annuals and a few perennials, and Dr. Joseph Karpinski donated a beautiful gazebo. The garden became alive again, and it has continued to improve right until this day.

It has become a family place. It is a place to come and enjoy summer concerts and even old movies. You can nearly always find people strolling and relaxing there. This past winter, there was a wonderful ice hockey event and there is an annual art benefit. And this weekend, it is time to enjoy a wonderful bit of the American spirit.

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