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This young man named Malachi helps a young lady with her catch of a catfish Thursday from the Windmill Pond at Arkalon Park during the Seward County K-State Extension office's Summer Fun Thursdays, which will be going on each Thursday until July 25 with various activities. Call the extension office at 624-5604 to find out what activities are still available. Courtesy photo

'Best kept secret' of area nears the 25-year mark

By RACHEL COLEMAN

- Leader & Times

Arkalon Park, where Liberal residents can fish, hike and observe nature, has reached the 24-year mark, and it's still flourishing.

“Everything’s going pretty good,” said camp host Dennis Pepper, who, with his wife Kay, has welcomed visitors to the site for 11 years. “We’ve gotten three pretty good rains out here, even on nights when Liberal didn’t have any, so things look green.”

The Peppers call Arkalon home from April 1 to Oct. 15 each year, living out of their camper in the tree-shaded basin hidden from view of the U.S. Hwy. 54 just a few miles east of Liberal. Arkalon’s campgrounds area has plenty of room for people to join the Peppers.



“We’ve put in some new concrete pads for travel trailers, last year,” Pepper said, “and they’re planning to pour more concrete this year.” Arkalon also added a toilet facility at the nearby fishing ponds, which are popular with day visitors as well as overnight campers.

Board member and volunteer Tracy Gutierrez has been working to enhance Arkalon Park with just such improvements.

“Arkalon will be 25 years old next year, and we’ve been working to develop a long-term plan,” he said.

The board recently adopted one-year-, two-year and five-year goals, one of which was to plant 100 trees over that time span.

“We also want to develop an ‘adopt-a-pond’ or ‘adopt-a-trail’ program, to get people and organizations involved,” Gutierrez said.

So far, several organizations have joined: Anadarko, Basic Energy, Black Hills Energy and Seward County 4-H clubs.

Earlier in June, Anadarko employees volunteered to plant trees donated by Black Hills Energy. Basic Energy agreed to build a new fishing dock at one of the ponds. Meanwhile, the board has arranged to build new benches with covers, install five more camper pads and clean up the camping area's trails.

All the improvements have grown out of a list that Gutierrez describes as a living document, compiled from ideas generated by the board, volunteers and camp visitors.

"We asked people for ideas about what they'd like to see in terms of the park's progress, and everything we're doing has come out of those suggestions," Gutierrez said. "Some things may work, and some may not, but we want to try to implement as much as we can."

Arkalon managers plan to increase the amount of fish stocked in the ponds, plant more trees around the fishing areas and "make it more enjoyable for people who go there," Gutierrez said. "We want to develop the park into being a real attraction in the area."

As the quarter-century mark nears, ideas have multiplied. The board envisions a year-long celebration with 25 special events, from Easter egg hunts to a haunted woods at season's end.

"There could also be special fishing derby events, a barbecue cook-off, special contests with the Parks and Recreation department," he said. "If people have an idea of what they'd like to see down there, they should let us know."

Until then, Arkalon will continue its summer routine, with plenty of peace and quiet for folks who want to get away from the everyday routine.

“It’s a pretty nice place to be,” Pepper said. “My wife and I enjoy being out here every year.”

With a wide spectrum of wildlife on the grounds, the Peppers are never alone. Deer, raccoons, beavers, wild turkey, myriad songbirds and migratory water birds, squirrels, and even a pair of bald eagles or two provide natural entertainment. Guests can cook out, camp, hike the trails, fish and relax far from the electronic glare of modern life.

“I think it’s one of the best-kept secrets of Southwest Kansas,” said Gutierrez.

Admission to Arkalon Park is free, \$5 per night for non-electric camping, \$15 per night for camper hook-ups. Those who fish must have a State of Kansas fishing license. The park remains open throughout the summer until Oct. 15.

For more information, contact the camp host at 626-0531 or visit the City of Liberal website, www.cityofliberal.org

Black Hills delivers ‘Power of Trees’ to Liberal

- Provided by Black Hills Energy

Black Hills Energy has donated 24 trees to the City of Liberal as part of the natural gas utility’s Power of Trees program. Black Hills Energy employees planted the trees Wednesday at

Arkalon Park.



Black Hills Energy works closely with members of the community and invites local volunteers to join company employees in planting the trees in parks, on school grounds, in new public spaces and other open areas. This is the program's seventh year.

"Trees help conserve energy, sustain the environment and improve the landscape," said Deanna Burkhart, Black Hills Energy operations supervisor for the Liberal area. "Our Power of Trees program is one way we work to improve the environment and help beautify communities we serve while spreading the message that everyone should consider planting a tree or two."

Trees reduce cooling and heating costs by providing shade in summer and a windbreak in winter. The Department of Energy estimates that carefully located trees can cut a home's energy consumption by 25 percent. Trees help purify the air by absorbing pollutants. They also help stop erosion, improve neighborhoods by serving as sound barriers, and even in urban settings can create a habitat for birds and other wildlife.

"Be careful not to plant trees where they could grow into overhead utility lines," Burkhart said. "And always follow the state law to call Kansas One-Call toll-free at 811 two or more business days before you dig," she said. "A technician will come out and mark the location of buried pipes and wires. It's a free service that can keep you from being responsible for expensive repairs or far worse, serious harm to you or someone you care about."

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