

# The many faces of township



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BROWNSTOWN CHARTER TOWNSHIP AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

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## parks & recreation

### *Parks and recreation programs improve quality of life and build community spirit*

It's June, when Michiganders plan neighborhood picnics and family reunions, fishing trips, softball tournaments and golf leagues—and many will enjoy those activities at township facilities. Operating a successful township parks and recreation program can have big payoffs in quality of life, community pride, higher visibility for township government and a sense of community for all residents.

The following articles explore the diverse and exciting parks and recreation programs offered by townships and provide tips to increase community involvement, apply for grants and reduce liability.

#### **Parks and recreation enrich residents' lives**

The most basic reason a township chooses to provide parks and recreation programs is to improve the quality of life for its residents. For many years, this has meant building and maintaining a ball diamond, playground or picnic area. However, as townships have grown, so have their citizens' needs. Many townships have begun to offer community education programs, festivals or activities recognizing cultural diversity in the community, increased accessibility to facilities, programs for persons of all ages and abilities, and more family-oriented activities or facilities.

Townships throughout Michigan have park commissions that administer large parks; community centers; baseball, softball and soccer leagues funded through fees; tennis courts; nature centers with trails; and wildlife habitats. Many townships also preserve natural features and open spaces or reclaim industrialized sites, railroad rights-of-way and even landfills.

#### **Townships authorized to provide programs**

Several statutes give townships the authority to provide parks and recreation facilities and pro-

grams such as parks, beaches, nature trails, community centers, stadiums, civic auditoriums, ice skating facilities, swimming pools, golf courses, sport leagues, senior citizen activities, cultural activities and special events.

The Township Parks Act (Public Act 157 of 1905, MCL 41.421, *et seq*) authorizes townships to acquire, maintain, manage and control parks, resorts, bathing beaches and places of recreation, and to acquire, construct and use wharves, piers, docks and landing places in townships.

PA 157 also authorizes townships to create a township park commission with the authority to issue bonds and levy taxes. Recent changes to MCL 41.426, as amended by PAs 15 and 16 of 1999, now require township park commissions to consist of five, seven or nine citizens elected to four-year terms. Park commissions develop, manage and maintain recreation programs and services. Some township recreation commissions are set up to work with a professional parks and recreation staff and have the authority to hire and supervise a parks and recreation director. Together with the director, they could establish the department's goals and budget.

The Recreation and Playgrounds Act (PA 156 of 1917, MCL 123.51, *et seq*) authorizes cities, villages, counties, townships and school districts to operate systems of public recreation and playgrounds.

The Metropolitan District Act (PA 312 of 1929, MCL 119.1, *et seq*) allows any two or more cities, villages, townships or any combination of those municipalities to incorporate a district to acquire, operate and maintain parks.

#### **Recreation programs take many forms**

Michigan townships provide a multitude of programs that vary widely in focus and size. A brief

sampling of Michigan townships reveals many types of parks and recreation programs and facilities, such as:

- The nationally recognized Summit on the Park indoor recreational and meeting facility in Canton Charter Township (Wayne County);
- Community ball fields and picnic pavilions, such as those in Bark River Township (Delta County);
- A fishing dock especially designed to be accessible to users with handicaps in Port Huron Charter Township (St. Clair County);
- Conversion of retired railroad grades to hiking paths in many townships across Michigan as part of the rails-to-trails movement;
- A conservation effort in Brooks Township (Newaygo County) that will result in light-use recreation for residents and tourists;
- The newly donated Hunter's Orchard lands in Delta Charter Township (Eaton County) that will become that township's newest park;
- A golf course in Kinross Township (Chippewa County); and
- A township parks system, community center, enrichment classes and athletic programs in suburban Brownstown Charter Township (Wayne County).

#### **Take a proactive approach to parks and recreation liability management**

Creating a parks and recreation program offers great rewards for the community, but where there are public facilities, there is also an increased risk of liability. While liability issues shouldn't scare a township away from developing parks and recreation programs, officials must take these risks into account and gauge the township's willingness and ability to keep recreational facilities in good repair.

For example, Brownstown Charter Township

takes a proactive approach to liability. "We do several things to help reduce liability," says Mark Maxe, parks and recreation director:

■ **Hire qualified people for enrichment program instructors.** "Our aerobics and karate instructors, for example, are trained and certified," says Maxe. Qualified instructors help reduce the chances of residents overdoing the exercise or injuring themselves during an activity.

■ **Provide proper facilities and equipment.** "We have mats on the floors for the karate class and the attack dummy is properly padded and weighted so it can't hurt anyone or fall over," says Maxe. Adequate room for movement is also taken into consideration.

■ **Conduct proper maintenance.** Townships are liable for bodily injury and property damage resulting from a public building's dangerous or defective condition, so any indoor recreational facility should be carefully constructed and maintained. Care should also be taken to maintain outdoor facilities and sidewalks. In Brownstown Charter Township, custodians replace lights and clean up spills quickly in the community center. They also conduct a weekly inspection of all park playground equipment. "That way, something's fixed promptly, and this helps us avoid any charges of gross negligence," says Maxe.

■ **Require program participants to sign liability releases.** Maxe says this is standard procedure for most recreation programs.

Townships may also be liable for developing sensitive ecological areas, most commonly wetlands, without proper permission from the state. In Brooks Township, a partnership with the state and local agencies has helped the township understand which natural areas can be developed and how.

### **Involve residents in program development**

Parks and recreation programs should fit the township's character, and the residents' needs should guide the recreation effort from the outset.

There are many ways to involve residents in the parks and recreation planning process. Townships can conduct open houses or public forums where

community members can develop recreational "wish lists." Large townships may wish to hold a series of such open houses or public forums in neighborhood schools or homes. Townships may also invite community input through written surveys included with the township newsletter or tax bills. Focus groups of representative citizens are another way to solicit resident input.

Dale Black, Brooks Township supervisor, was pleased with resident turnout for a series of meetings held to get input on the township's proposed recreation/conservation efforts. He attributes the turnout to personal phone calls made to area residents, special mailed invitations and talking with people on the street. Black also advises that, once residents show up for meetings, facilitators must listen and respond to what residents say to let them know their opinions are valuable.

### **Develop a written recreation plan**

A written recreation plan is essential to guiding the township's recreational efforts—and is required when applying for Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grants. To be eligible, townships must have approved recreation plans on file with the DNR and must update the plans at least every five years.

The guidebook, *Community Recreation Planning*, can help townships develop a recreation plan, and it describes what a plan must contain to qualify for DNR grants. To obtain a copy, contact the DNR Grants Administration Division at P.O. Box 30425, Lansing, MI 48909, (517) 373-9125, or the 24-hour voice mail line at (517) 373-2724.

Generally, a recreation plan should contain the following information:

**1. Action program**—Describe the recreation projects planned for the next five years. The action program must include a capital improvement schedule, anticipated acquisitions and developments by year, and estimated project costs by anticipated funding sources. Include a map showing the proposed project location(s).

**2. Basis for action program**—Explain and document how each item in the action program is a community priority. Documentation might include citizen comments, observed use levels, comparisons of existing recreation opportunities to established standards and current facility locations. "We realize that plans don't come to fruition exactly as planned sometimes," says Deborah Apostol of the DNR Grants Administration Division, "but it's important for grant evaluators to see how specific projects contribute to the overall recreation effort."

**3. Planning process description**—Describe the major steps in developing the plan, the major organizations and committees involved in the plan-



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*Townships can fund softball and other athletic leagues through fees.*

ning process, and how the public was involved. At a minimum, citizens should have a well-publicized opportunity to review and comment on a draft plan before it is officially adopted. If there is opposition to the plan, the township should explain how it plans to address those concerns.

**4. Recreation inventory**—Include a complete inventory and map of all public, non-profit and commercial recreation facilities and programs available in the township and the surrounding area.

**5. Community description**—Describe the social and physical characteristics of the township. Social factors include the township's population and growth trends; age, gender and racial composition; number of residents with disabilities; employment trends; socioeconomic levels; and the needs of low-income and minority citizens. Physical factors include topography, water resources, climate, soils, fish and wildlife resources, zoning, land use patterns, environmental problems, and transportation systems.

**6. Administrative structure**—Describe how the recreation projects will be implemented. Explain who operates the recreation facilities; the role of the park commission, if one exists; and the budget for programs and staffing.

A recreation plan may not be required for grants from funding sources other than the DNR, but it is worth compiling because it includes information requested in most grant applications. The recreation plan and grant applications can be written by the township board, parks and recreation staff, a park commission or board, an ad hoc citizens' committee, the planning commission, a regional planning commission or a private consultant. You don't have to be a professional writer to write a good plan or successful grant—many township officials and residents have done so.

"The grant application tells you what you need to include," says Grand Haven Charter Township (Ottawa County) Superintendent Bill Cargo, who wrote a successful Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) grant proposal in 1999. "Then it's a matter of providing the figures and documentation." Cargo, whose grant garnered >



*Townships can choose to protect natural resources, such as the meadow beauty.*

***Parks and recreation programs should fit the township's character.***



CANTON CHARTER TOWNSHIP

A family enjoys the leisure pool in the aquatic center at Canton Charter Township's Summit on the Park facility.

\$99,000 for developing a boat launch, said he received helpful feedback from the MNRTF staff for a previous grant proposal.

**Consider sources of assistance and funding**

Once your township has a cogent plan for its parks and recreation program, implementing it will require a significant investment in time and money—though this does not necessarily mean that township officials must provide all the time or that the township must provide all the money. Time investments include meeting with residents to determine what kind of parks and recreation programs they want, writing grants proposals, taking bids on construction and making sure the

parks and recreational facilities are properly maintained. Parks and recreation commissioners, staff and volunteers can take on many of these tasks.

Townships can fund parks and recreation projects with start-up funds, user fees, and private and public grants, most notably those available through the DNR, including the MNRTF and the Clean Michigan Initiative (CMI) Bond Fund.

MNRTF monies are primarily awarded to help local governmental units acquire park lands. Brooks and Grand Haven Charter Townships both won MNRTF grants in 1999. Although 25% of the trust fund is earmarked for development, there is a lot of competition for those grants.

The CMI Bond Fund has funded many township

projects, but the \$50 million allocated to the fund will nearly be gone when September 1, 2000, grant applicant winners are announced early in 2001, according to Apostol (see page 13).

DNR grants are also available for fishing, boating, off-road vehicle trails, tree planting, wildlife habitat improvement and other projects. To learn what grants are currently available, click on "Grants & Financial Assistance" on the DNR web site at: [www.dnr.state.mi.us](http://www.dnr.state.mi.us), or contact the DNR Grants Administration Division, P.O. Box 30425, Lansing, MI 48909, (517) 373-9125.

The DNR holds free grantwriting seminars around the state early each year to help communities understand the grants process. Apostol says the next round of grantwriting seminars will likely be scheduled for early 2001. Check the DNR web site or contact the Grants Administration Division to find out when dates will be set.

The Michigan Humanities Council (MHC) is another source of parks and recreation funding. Brownstown Charter Township, for example, received a grant to sponsor a summer concert series. The council sponsors projects up to \$12,000 that involve humanities or cultural events. Grant recipients must match 25% of the cost. To learn more about Michigan Humanities Council grants, visit the MHC web site at: [mihumanities.h-net.msu.edu](http://mihumanities.h-net.msu.edu) and click on "Grants Opportunities," or call (517) 372-7770.

Sixty-one townships received 1999-2000 Michigan Transportation Enhancement Program

# Parks and Recreation Tips

Brooks Township (Newaygo County) and Brownstown Charter Township (Wayne County) are two very different townships with very different parks and recreation initiatives (see page 14). What the townships *do* have in common are strategies that have made their initiatives a success:

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Newaygo Conservation Effort members solicited input from Brooks Township residents at meetings and open houses.

■ **Listen to what residents want.** Communications professionals can help facilitate community meetings to find out what residents value about their area.

■ **Don't let initial plans collect dust.** Use the recreation plan to develop other plans such as the master plan and update it at least once every five years with resident surveys.

■ **Seek funding sources.** See information in the article above to start looking for parks and recreation program grants.

■ **Promote your program widely and creatively.** Consider mailing a quarterly parks and recreation newsletter to all residents or distribute flyers on individual programs to local school children. Your local cable stations and/or newspapers may also run notices about programs.

*The Brooks Township Land Use Vision (LUV)* is a glossy booklet with a four-color cover that features pictures of significant area features. "People respond better when things look nice," says Township Supervisor Dale Black. He also credits high turnout at the LUV presentation open house, in part, to nicely designed invitations sent to area residents. Black also credits local news coverage, in addition to mailings and phone calls, with helping to spark interest in the area's recreation/conservation efforts. A local kindergarten teacher created a coloring book for grade school children featuring unique local flora and fauna. The back page of the coloring book was aimed at helping parents become aware of the township's efforts to preserve area features.

■ **Organize volunteers.** Townships don't need large amounts of money to run a successful park or recreational program if they can encourage volunteerism in community members. Organize a clean-up day with local residents or ask parents to serve as coaches for a community's athletic programs. ❖

—Jean Hughes Raber

funds. Many of these projects included developing parks and recreational facilities along state roadways. For more information about enhancement grants, visit [www.mdot.state.mi.us/programs/enhance/enhance.htm](http://www.mdot.state.mi.us/programs/enhance/enhance.htm), or call (517) 335-2636.

### Promote parks and recreation programs

Many townships use several venues to promote their parks and recreation program. A yearly open house at a community center or a picnic in the local park is a good way to get people to participate, especially if the township is introducing a new facility. Open houses and picnics can be simple potluck affairs or more elaborate events with games, food vendors, music and special activities.

Some townships send a parks and recreation newsletter to all residents. Sending information to families through the schools, in tax bills or the township newsletter, or on a web site are also common ways to promote programs.

Local media will often print free information about recreation facilities or upcoming programs. In Brownstown Charter Township, the local newspaper devotes a quarter-page ad every three months to upcoming township programs. The local cable access channel also advertises events on its marquee.

Townships may gain recognition for their parks and recreation programs through the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports. According to Marilyn Lieber, the council's director of special events and projects, Meridian Charter Township and seven other communities recently participated in a community action pilot program and will be recognized at an awards banquet on October 16, 2000, at the Lansing Center in Lansing.

The community action program—just one of the council's many recognition initiatives—provides communities with a questionnaire measuring the number and type of recreational/pedestrian opportunities offered to residents. "These can be anything from bike racks on buses to sidewalks to hiring a parks and recreation director," says Lieber. The questionnaire has several categories, and communities must garner points in all categories to qualify for recognition.

Meridian Charter Township scored a total of 169 points out of a possible 235, making it a Level 4 community out of a possible five levels. Level 4 communities, according to the pilot program, have made "outstanding achievements in making it easy for people to be active."

While no cash is awarded as part of the recognition, Lieber explains that the questionnaire helps communities think about ways they can provide more recreational and fitness resources to residents. The council also coordinates local and statewide media coverage of a community's recognition.

The council is revamping the questionnaire based on the pilot and will have the final version ready for communities in October, with a projected May 1, 2001, application deadline. For more information, phone the Governor's Council at (800) 434-8642. ♦

## CMI Bond Fund provides grants for local parks ... but the money is going fast

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources Clean Michigan Initiative (CMI) Recreation Bond program disbursed approximately \$6.4 million to townships in its first two rounds, but the \$50-million fund will be nearly used up after grants are awarded in September.

Created by a 1998 ballot initiative, the CMI Recreation Bond program provides grants to local governmental units to develop and renovate public outdoor and indoor recreation facilities. The grants are awarded based on applicant need, ability to complete the project and quality of the proposed project site. Projects are distributed by region, with 72% of the \$50-million fund earmarked for projects in southern lower Michigan, 14.5% for northern lower Michigan and 3.6% for the Upper Peninsula. Approximately 10% of the funds go to regional parks around the state.

Two rounds of funding are offered each year, with an estimated \$10 to \$12 million distributed in each round. Grant recipients for the first two rounds (April 1 and September 1, 1999) have been announced, and include 44 townships. The grants made to townships range from \$750,000 awarded to Canton Charter Township (Wayne County, population 69,829\*) for improvements, including a fitness center, expanded locker rooms and related improvements at Summit on the Park Community Center, to \$22,688 awarded to Tittabawassee Township (Saginaw County, population 6,569) to add an overlook pier at Memorial Park.

A sampling of some of the grants illustrates the diversity of township programs and facilities across Michigan:

■ **Wells Township** (Delta County, population 5,527)—\$350,000 to make ice rink equipment, parking and utility improvements and upgrades at the township sports complex.

■ **Big Prairie Township** (Newaygo County, population 2,100)—\$342,000 to make campground improvements and add 21 campsites at Big Bend Park/South.

■ **Byron Township** (Kent County, population 16,248)—\$299,472 to construct Rush Creek Park, which will include lighted softball fields, a fishing pond, nature trails and picnic areas.

■ **Flushing Charter Township** (Genesee County, population 9,964)—\$261,525 to develop trails, an observation tower, play equipment and a park manager's office, and to preserve and enhance natural features and improve access to the Flint River in Flushing Township Park.

■ **Ira Township** (St. Clair County, population 5,791)—\$144,000 to develop a walk-in neighborhood park with a seawall and a walkway on a small peninsula on Swan Creek and a canal.

■ **Mills Township** (Midland County, population 1,935)—\$79,500 to construct a one-mile running track through the woods at the Mills Township Park.

■ **Chassell Township** (Houghton County, population 1,735)—\$70,000 to construct a multi-use community pavilion with access and parking lot improvements at Centennial Park on Portage Lake.

■ **Milton Township** (Antrim County, population 1,669)—\$43,077 to develop a soccer center with parking at the township park.

Deborah Apostol, of the DNR Grants Administration Division, says the department is now reviewing the third round of grant applications submitted April 1, 2000. The next round of applications is due September 1, 2000. Townships seeking to apply for a CMI Recreation Bond grant must have an approved recreation plan on file with the DNR by August 1, 2000. Depending on funding, there may be a partial final round due April 1, 2001.

To learn more about the program, click on "Grants & Financial Assistance" on the DNR web site at: [www.dnr.state.mi.us](http://www.dnr.state.mi.us), or contact the DNR Grants Administration Division, P.O. Box 30425, Lansing, MI 48909, (517) 373-9125. ♦



Canton Charter Township received a \$750,000 CMI Bond Fund grant for improvements at its Summit on the Park multi-purpose facility.

\*All population figures are 1996 Census Bureau estimates.

## Brownstown Township provides full-service parks and recreation program

**B**rownstown Charter Township's (Wayne County) parks and recreation program not only enhances the quality of life for its approximately 35,000 residents, but also helps connect them with township government in a positive way, according to Parks and Recreation Director Mark Maxe. That's not really surprising when you consider that the parks and recreation program attracts an estimated 25,000 participants each year.

"A lot of people are more familiar with us than with any other aspect of the township," says Maxe. "And they feel comfortable calling the community center for information. Most of them are happy with what they get in the parks and recreation programs, and this makes them more receptive to other township efforts and programs. When our phone rings, probably a quarter of the calls are questions about township activities," says Maxe. Callers may ask about the township's recycling program or when township meetings will be held.

Township residents may also call Maxe's department because it stays open until 6 p.m., which makes it easier for working people to

sign up for programs. About four years ago, the department started taking credit cards so people could register over the phone, and 10 to 15% of registrations come in that way.

The township offers an impressive array of programs for residents—a senior citizen club that provides social events, transportation and meals; the Summer Festival that attracts about 30,000 attendees; recreation programs that serve 800 children; adult softball leagues; enrichment classes in everything from aerobics to dog obedience; nine neighborhood parks, and more.

### The recreation plan forms the cornerstone of new programs

With support from a receptive township board, the parks and recreation program has grown with the township. As population in this downriver community grew by approximately 30% in the past 10 years, its parks and recreation effort has grown from a few softball leagues to a multi-faceted program with a new community center. A key to that growth has been the township's recreation plan.

Developing the recreation plan, says Maxe, is an ongoing process. "We have a plan on file with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources," he says, noting that updating the plan is relatively easy. It's getting the first plan together that's most challenging.

Maxe encourages townships embarking on a first-time recreation plan to think about hiring a professional. Consulting firms can easily put together statistical information.

To involve residents in program development, the township held a series of neighborhood focus meetings. Anywhere from a dozen to 50 attendees turned out at different meetings. "Turnout was lower in areas where there were parks," said Maxe. "Possibly, residents there felt that they had a facility and were satisfied with what we were already offering."

Neighborhood feedback to the initial



Brownstown Township recreation programs like ice cream socials and the Summer Festival features performers.



## Conservation at heart of Brooks Township park

**L**ocated 35 miles north of Grand Rapids on M-37, Brooks Township (Newaygo County) is one of the few places in Michigan where you can see prickly pear cactus growing wild along the roadsides, hike in a sand prairie, fish in a blue-ribbon trout stream and see the endangered Karner blue butterfly fluttering amidst rare patches of wild lupine.

In an effort to preserve and share these environmental treasures with other Michigan residents, the township partnered with several private conservation organizations and governmental agencies to develop a unique Land Use Vision (LUV) statement to help guide development, preserve natural resources and create a light recreation area.

Developing the recreation area is a work in progress. By 2003, the township hopes to open a light-impact recreation (hiking, hunting and fishing) area in the prairie that will attract 1,886 tourists annually and provide an economic boost for the area. The park will also provide educational opportunities for area schools and camps.

If the LUV is fully implemented, Brooks Township will not only have a unique recreational area, but a growing population imbued with a strong sense of stewardship for the area's unique ecological features and a legacy of environmental

appreciation to pass on to future residents. It is a very ambitious plan, and it is remarkable in that it relies largely on citizen education and voluntary compliance from private landowners.

The LUV was developed with input from township residents with the help of the Newaygo Conservation Effort (NCE), a consortium of public and private organizations including, among others, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy, a private conservation organization.

The partnership between the NCE and Brooks Township began in November 1997, when NCE members were working on a plan to conserve the Newaygo Outwash Plain, a geological area running from Traverse City through the township. "They realized this project was really too big to get their arms around all at once," says Brooks Township Supervisor Dale Black. "I suggested they might want to start by working with the township."

From the beginning, NCE members and the township wanted a relationship in which residents helped guide the effort. To kick off that partnership, the NCE facilitated two resident meetings in March 1998. Seventy-five residents attended the first meeting; 55 residents attended the second. In June 1998, 28 residents attended a picnic and

field trip of selected natural areas and were able to socialize with NCE members.

NCE members collected residents' comments and then added their own professional observations. The result was the LUV, a set of long-range, land-use recommendations emphasizing the ecological significance of area flora and fauna. Township residents were invited to view the LUV draft at a township hall open house in December 1998, which 102 residents attended. The final version was available in March 1999.

Black says the meetings between residents and NCE members were successful for a number of reasons:

■ **Shared values/shared vision**—The focus of the meetings was to find out what community members value about their local area and to develop,





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plans was collected and presented at a series of community meetings. Turnout for those sessions was also good, and once the township felt it understood the community's wishes, the recreation plan was completed.

"Don't be afraid to dream, but be realistic when you put your plan together," says Maxe. He also advises townships to include

both immediate and long-range projects. "In our first plan, we didn't show a lot of foresight in what we wanted to see several years down the road." However, the plan is now updated at least every five years with input from community surveys.

**Funding sources and partnerships fuel an active program**

Along with township funds and program fees, the township utilizes an impressive array of funding

recreation programs serve 800 hockey (below). The Summer Concert like the Marvelettes (above).



sources for its parks and recreation programs, including federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG); Michigan Department of Natural Resources grants; the state-supported Senior Alliance; the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation; the Michigan Humanities Council; and sponsorships and donations from about 150 area businesses and civic organizations.

In 1992, the township completed its Community Center, a \$1.6 million facility funded with CDBG, CMI Bond Fund and township general fund money. The center houses the parks and recreation department and was designed for maximum flexibility. It can accommodate 323 people in six large meeting rooms, and moveable, sound-proof walls allow the center to be configured to accommodate a variety of events.

"We use the center for everything, all day, every day," says Maxe. The center provides senior citizen programs and meals, enrichment programs, and meetings for local groups during the day and evening. On weekends, the facility is rented for local community groups, parties and other functions. "We book about 100 dates per year," says Maxe.

Township parks and recreation programs

operate on a break-even or modest profit basis. "For example, we make a profit on our adult softball leagues," Maxe explains. Profits from that program go into a special parks and recreation scholarship program for disadvantaged youngsters.

Township volunteers play a large part in the parks and recreation programs. All coaches are volunteers, mostly parents. However, enrichment program instructors are paid, certified professionals.

The township also partners with nearby communities to provide additional recreational outlets. For example, the neighboring City of Trenton provides a program for emotionally and mentally handicapped children. Children from the township are charged a higher non-resident fee, but the township picks up the difference. "When you figure what it would cost us to duplicate this program, paying the difference is a lot cheaper and makes more sense," says Maxe.

The township also sponsors a Summer Concert in the Parks program with the nearby municipality of Woodhaven. The parks in which the concerts are held are within a mile-and-a-half of each other, and Woodhaven and the township split the cost. ♦

with the help of professional conservationists, a vision to preserve what they value.

■ **Professional and nonthreatening communicators**—NCE meeting facilitators listened



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and responded respectfully to what residents said about the resources in their township. As a result, residents felt they were part of the process.

■ **Meeting attendance and participation**—To spark interest in the meetings, Black sent postcards, made phone calls, talked with people on the street and invited the press.

■ **Non-regulatory nature of the LUV**—Some 27 points in the LUV have an education component and 17 seek voluntary cooperation from township land owners.

The LUV contains four areas of special concern: Water resources, land (forest and prairies), recreation and trash disposal. Some key recommendations of the LUV include limiting development along waterways, reducing sedimentation rates, limiting development in sand prairies and encouraging residents to cut trees to promote prairie growth.

There's a lot to be done, and it will take money. The township has already received approximately \$785,000 from grants sources. Besides the \$30,000 provided by The Freemont Area Foundation to hire a LUV project coordinator, the township received \$675,000 from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to acquire a 320-acre parcel of sand prairie. It also garnered \$77,500 in in-kind contributions from NCE partners to help implement the plan.

"The township won't be able to put out a lot of money for this," says Black, who found out about

**By Jean Hughes Raber**

DNR grants from The Nature Conservancy, and then learned about The Freemont Area Foundation. "At some point, we might have a fundraiser or a fund for resident donations."

Getting grant money to implement the LUV has helped keep community interest high, and community interest is what Black and other township officials want to see. They don't want the LUV to simply collect dust.

John Legge, NCE member and landscape conservation planner with The Nature Conservancy, doesn't think the LUV will languish. The Nature Conservancy intends to donate 80 acres of prairie to the township and assist in managing the entire 400 acres of sand prairie, forest, wetlands and a pond.

"It's clear to us that the current township residents and administration are committed to maintaining the same unique features of this area that we are," says Legge. The Nature Conservancy and others in the NCE will continue to help guide management of the sand prairie.

Township officials are also keeping the dust off the LUV by using it to help guide the planning commission's rewrite of the township's Master Plan. In addition, LUV Project Coordinator Kara McCrimmon, who was hired in March, is putting together promotions and resources by developing press releases, a township web page, a resources lending library at the township hall and supplemental curriculum for area schools. ♦

NCE members took interested Newaygo Township residents on a field trip to the proposed recreation area, which is home to prickly pear cactus (left) and wild lupine (far left).

