

Blanchard improves its parks and trails

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By Julianna Parker, Transcript Staff Writer

BLANCHARD — The city's parks are getting a facelift, thanks to several local organizations and state grants.

Blanchard Community Coalition, Nu Chi and the City of Blanchard have all worked to improve Lions Park recently.

City workers began setting up a new playground at the park in southwest Blanchard this week, said Monte Ketcham, Blanchard's public works director.

The play set should be finished by the end of the month, he said.

The Nu Chi chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, a community service sorority, started raising money for Blanchard's Lions Park about five years ago, Nu Chi President Suzanne Williams said in an interview this spring.

In 2005, the sorority raised enough money to purchase playground equipment for older kids, as well as a swing set, she said.

Nu Chi raised a little over \$12,000 by May, Williams said. The city matched their funds to enable them to buy playground equipment in May for \$23,000.

The city is now installing this play set for children ages 2-5.

Blanchard Community Coalition has also been working to improve the city's parks.

BCC received a \$5,000 grant from the Oklahoma Department of Health to purchase lighting and water fountains for the park. The city will install the new equipment soon, BCC member Susan Ketter said.

There will be a grand re-opening celebration at Lions Park sometime this fall, she said.

The city recently received another grant for a trails system in Blanchard.

The 2007 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant was given by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. It will provide \$160,000 for the "Connecting Our Neighbors Through Trails" project.

"This is great news for Blanchard," said Sen. Jonathan Nichols, R-Norman. "This grant will enable us to create a new trail to connect two existing parks, complete with landscaping. It's going to be something really nice for families, school and church groups who want to enjoy nature."

The RTP provides for a Federal-aid assistance program to states for provision and maintenance of recreational trails for motorized and non-motorized trail use.

The program guidelines require the funds be used for recreational trails and trails-related projects. Specific uses include trail maintenance and restoration, land acquisition, construction of new trails, trail access for persons with disabilities and development of trail-head and trail-side facilities, according to a state press release.

"This is a terrific program that offers select communities the opportunity to construct recreational assets they otherwise would not be able to fund," Tourism Department Executive Director Hardy Watkins said in the release.