

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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NEW PROJECTS ANNOUNCED FOR “LINCOLN CARES”

Community donation program has new corporate matching sponsor

Mayor Chris Beutler today announced that the Lincoln Cares program will help fund six projects and programs across the community in 2009. Lincoln Cares is a community donation program, which allows Lincoln Electric System (LES) customers to voluntarily add one dollar to their bill payments each month for projects not included in the City budget.

The Mayor made the announcement at the Air Park West Recreation Center, where the NEOS play center was on display. The high-tech, interactive, portable play tower is one of the items to be funded by Lincoln Cares this year. The 2009 Lincoln Cares project list also includes the development of the Witherbee Park playground; a solar-heated pool and bathhouse demonstration project at Woods Pool; Union Plaza; and Boosalis Trail renovation from 17th to 20th streets. *(More details on the projects are attached.)*

Mayor Beutler also announced that Lincoln Cares has a new lineup of matching sponsors. Lincoln Parks Foundation will provide a 50-cent match for every dollar contributed, up to \$15,000, for the next year. The Foundation joins Time Warner Cable (TWC), which is in its second year of sponsorship. TWC will provide \$30,000 in matching dollars and another \$30,000 for on-air promotion of Lincoln Cares.

“In the past six years, that small monthly donation from many people has added up to some big improvements for our City parks system,” said Mayor Beutler. “I want to thank LES customers for continuing to support our parks through Lincoln Cares. And I commend Lincoln Parks Foundation and Time Warner Cable for helping us stretch those dollars even farther. In these tough economic times, this public-private partnership gives everyone in Lincoln an easy way to do their part for our parks.”

“We’re very grateful to the Lincoln community and are proud to be able to support this project and make Lincoln an even better place to live and do business,” said Ann Shrewsbury, Director of Public Affairs for TWC. “We have nearly 300 employees who are proud to call Lincoln home, and this was another great way for us to give back to them as well as show our appreciation to customers here.”

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From its inception in February 2003 through January 2009, Lincoln Cares has collected \$435,891 from LES customers adding a dollar to their bill payments and through direct payments to Lincoln Parks Foundation. An average of 4,974 LES customers donate to the program every month. Another \$5,264 has been contributed through partnerships with Pepsi, Lincoln Benefit Life, Olsson Associates and Culver's Restaurants. The corporate contribution to Lincoln Cares now totals \$390,000 for a total collection of \$831,233.

Other projects funded in the first six years of the program include air conditioning at Antelope Park enclosed shelter; the acquisition of prairie and grasslands at Pioneers Park; the Nebraska State Liberty Bell Shelter in Antelope Park; restoration of the Four Wars Memorial and Pioneer Woman sculptures; the Sunken Gardens renovation; an addition to the Nature Center Prairie Building; the Park Middle School Teen Center; benches along the Holmes Lake Trail Loop; a shelter at Woods Park; the Bethany Park Shelter; the Green Team Youth Employment Program; the Youth Outdoor Adventure Program; Peach Park expansion; Pioneers Park Nature Center art work; the Jamaica North Trail Bridge; Bountiful Prairie sculpture renovation; historic lighting at Sunken Gardens; picnic tables at Bowling Lake; Trago Park Sprayground; lighting at Pocras Park; an upgraded toddler play area at the Ager Play Center; Lincoln Safari program; shooting sports facility; and Parker's Pals swim and recreation program scholarships for low-income youth.

"Lincoln Cares is a perfect fit for the mission of the Lincoln Parks Foundation, which is to provide funds to help enhance our parks and recreation opportunities above and beyond what the City should budget for each year," said Christie Dionisopoulos, President of the Lincoln Parks Foundation. "As Lincoln grows, so do the demands on our parks system. We believe strongly that Lincoln parks and recreation programs and facilities are fundamental to our community and we are excited to be a new partner with Lincoln Cares."

"We are very thankful for everyone who supports this program," said Lynn Johnson, Director of the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department. "With our tight budget, this program allows us to go the extra mile to keep the parks system one of the jewels of Lincoln."

To donate to Lincoln Cares, LES customers can add one dollar to their bill payments each month. Those who pay LES through automatic bank billing can add Lincoln Cares to their payments each month by calling LES at 475-4211.

For more information on Lincoln Cares, contact the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department at 441-8264 or see the City's Web site at lincoln.ne.gov (keyword: cares).

2009 Lincoln Care Projects

The Lincoln Cares Advisory Board approved the following projects to be funded in 2009:

Witherbee Park Play Area – \$25,000

Research shows the important benefits that play in natural settings has on children's social, physical and cognitive development. A continuing emphasis in the development of Lincoln's park system is providing outdoor play and activity areas within neighborhoods. Lincoln Cares funds will be used to develop a new outdoor play area in Witherbee Park at 46th and "O" streets to serve children and families living in mid-town neighborhoods.

NEOS Play Tower – \$24,000

NEOS is a high-tech, interactive, portable game tower that the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department will place at pools, recreation centers and community events for everyone to enjoy. The NEOS game system features four sleek towers with flashing lights, music and sound effects. Players run back and forth, racing the clock and each other to slap blinking lights. The system includes nine games for all ages encouraging physical activity, social interaction and fun. NEOS is weather-proof and vandalism-proof.

Solar-Heated Pool and Bathhouse Demonstration Project – \$20,000

Lincoln's public outdoor pools are heated with natural gas. Lincoln Cares funds will be used to develop a demonstration project harnessing the energy of the sun with solar panels to heat pool water and to provide heated water for bathhouse showers at Woods Pool.

Union Plaza – \$20,000

Union Plaza, a six acre park planned for the three-block area between 21st, 22nd, "O" and "R" streets, is a centerpiece of the Antelope Valley Project. Features will include fountains, seating areas, an outdoor amphitheater, an overlook area, a children's play area, public art and a plaza walkway suitable for events and festivals. The estimated cost of this project and a maintenance fund is \$6.4 million, which includes public and private funding.

Boosalis Trail Renovation – \$10,000

Lincoln's 128 miles of trails provide significant recreational opportunities for Lincoln residents. Residents also are increasingly using trails to commute to work, school and other daily activities. The section of the Helen Boosalis Trail along the north side of Highway 2 between 20th and 27th Streets is currently under renovation. The aging asphalt surface is being replaced with concrete. Lincoln Cares funds will help fund the renovation of the remaining portion of the Boosalis Trail from 17th to 20th streets.

Parker's Pals Swim and Recreation Program Scholarships – \$10,000

Funds are used to provide scholarships to children from low-income families for swimming lessons through a partnership with the Red Cross and Lincoln Parks and Recreation. In 2008, Lincoln Cares provided 293 pool admission fee waivers, 169 scholarships for swim lessons and nine scholarships for swimming and diving team; five scholarships for Wilderness Park day camp; 26 scholarships for girls' basketball program and 47 before- and after-school program scholarships.