

## **Park for special needs children to break ground in Delran**

By Kathleen Duffy

For NewsWorks

Delran's Mayor Ken Paris is looking to fill both a countywide need and expand his personal longtime passion this spring.

A new municipal recreational center geared toward children with special needs will soon break ground off of Hartford Road and will be the only park of its kind in Burlington County.

"There is not a facility that I know of in Burlington County for special needs children," says Paris.

Elementary to high school aged children with special needs will be able to utilize a synthetic turf field in the new complex.

At completion, the new 34-acre center will also include three playing fields catered toward school-aged baseball and softball players, one multipurpose field, and an accessible playground area.

In addition, nature trails with a bikeway stretching to nearby Notre Dame Park, handicap accessible restrooms, and a concession stand will be constructed.

The first phase of the project, which includes building the three fields and the handicap accessible field along with the roads leading to the site, is slated to be complete by spring 2013.

"We want to build these four fields as much as we can," says Township Engineer Jim Winckowski, in reference to the beginning phase.

The land on which the park will be built will be on different elevations, he says, which will add an extra dimension to the project.

"It's not going to be one big, flat park like you'd usually see," he says.

Taxpayer money will only be needed in the maintenance and upkeep of the fields. The project is fully funded by grants and will not be a heavy burden on residents.

"It's all by grants and open space funds," Paris says. "This has been an open area for a long time."

The Township of Delran received an \$800,000 reimbursable acquisitions grant from the state through the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, and Burlington County matched an additional \$200,000.

Delran also received \$250,000 from the County Municipal Park Grant in both 2009 and 2011.

“The property that we acquired by open space is the Myers Tract,” says Paris. The purchase was made final last year.

Delran Township High School will also benefit from the project.

“Since it’s close to the high school, we’re looking at probably sharing resources with the high school, which will enable the high school to also utilize the facilities,” Paris says.

Delran Athletic Association’s President, Dan Yaniro, thinks the park will be beneficial to the township.

“You do need some recreation for the kids in our town,” he says. “It’s a good thing.”

“If you don’t have recreation for the kids, what are they going to do? At least we’ll have a nice facility for these kids to be proud of.”

As his youngest son is already 12 years old, his only complaint is that the project did not begin sooner.

“The younger kids in town will have a nice complex to play with,” he says.

Paris’s passion for the project stems from a childhood of watching his father immerse himself in projects to benefit residents with special needs.

“I always had the passion of continuing my father’s desire to help special needs kids,” he says.

In his eyes, this project will be doing just that.

“It gives them the opportunity to have facilities that they can use and enjoy as well.”

He believes that this is the most important project he has undertaken during his four years as Delran’s mayor.

“It’s something that is special for the county,” says Paris. “It’s going to be a nice site when it’s done.”

Learn more about the Green Acres Program by visiting (EMBED LINK)  
<http://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres>.