

# enjoys revitalization of Sappa Park

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

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Trails, food plots, picnic areas, a disk golf course and a community garden have made Sappa Park the top recreational spot in Decatur County.

In the past 2 1/2 years, volunteers have turned the city-owned park, about two miles east of Oberlin, back into a family-friendly place to play.

People looking for the park will see a sign at the entrance east of town and should take a left off of U.S. 36. Those coming from the east will see a sign for the Last Indian Raid Monument, with a smaller one underneath marking the park, and should take a right. A paved road winds its way into the park, ending at the shelter house.

Members of the Sappa Park Committee under Decatur Tomorrow and volunteers with Pheasants Forever have held several work days to clean out old vehicles, tires, brush and trash to help revitalize the park, which used to be a place for people to picnic, swim, fish and boat when it was a state lake.

The park committee, said co-convenor Carolyn Burtis, has carved eight trails out of the grass and weeds, including the wilderness, lake bottom, big island, lower dam, little island, berm, upper north side and the lower north side routes.

The committee has marked each trailhead, she said, with an extra post at each to hold a container with maps of the trails for hikers to pick up.

The group maintains all of the trails with the help of Pheasants Forever. Through fund raisers, said Mrs. Burtis, the Park Committee was able to buy a mower that's pulled by a four wheeler. All of the trails are mowed, making it easier for people to walk and distinguishing the trails from the naturally growing vegetation.

Rick Pauls, with Pheasants Forever, Bill Reidel and LaVern Burtis put in five walking crossings on the trails to cross over the creek, she said.

Two fire pits have been installed on the little island, south of the shelter house, and one in front, near the lake bed, said Mrs. Burtis.

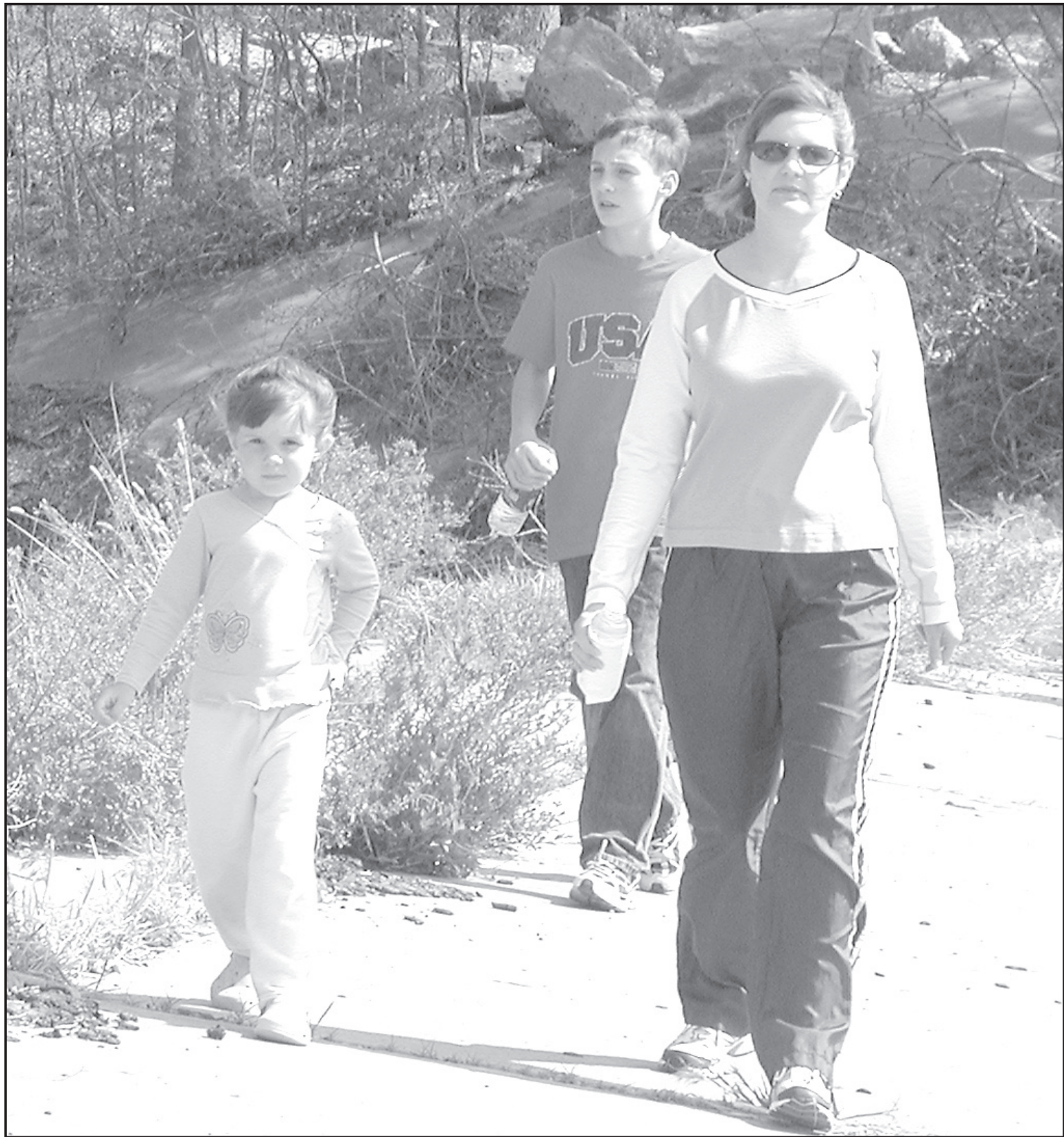
Two park benches were donated after the first work day over two years ago, said Mrs. Burtis. Since then, Larry Mack made a wooden picnic table and donated it. Other groups in town and individuals purchased 11 picnic tables made of recycled material for the park with a price tag of \$500 each.

Since the first big clean up, she said, the city has committed to mow around the shelter house, campgrounds and roadsides.

This spring, said Mrs. Burtis, the 2008 senior class spent a day at the park, cleaning up trails, tearing down an old storage building, picking up limbs and doing other jobs.

Just recently, she said, the city put in three lights near the bathrooms at the first campground. There's water at the campground now, she said, though it hasn't been tested for drinking.

Pheasants Forever has a lease with the city for the lake bottom and other former farmland areas at the park. The conservation group, said



**AT SAPPA PARK** Dana Koerperich, her daughter Melody and son Caleb took advantage of the trails during the Decatur County Hospital community walk.

—Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Mr. Pauls, has planted the lake bottom to switch grass, Indian grass and big bluestem grass.

With the idea of having a community garden, where people can come in and pick what they will use, the group planted an orchard, including, apple, peach, pear, crab apple, choke cherry, sand hill plums and American plum trees. Mr. Pauls said they have four acres of sweet corn free to pick and an acre and a half of pumpkins.

The fruit trees, he said, were hammered by

the hail earlier this month, so might need to be replanted.

The group also planted burr oak trees and a wildflower mix at the park. In the future, he said, they've talked about putting a picnic area near the top of the park.

Mrs. Burtis said she would like to get electrical outlets at the campground. If that happens, she said, then they could put out a donation box for people who use the area. She said they have screen doors that just got put on the restrooms,

which are more like outhouses, and screens for the windows, too.

The biggest need, she said, is to get a wetlands at the park. The City Council recently approved \$12,025 for an engineer to draw up plans. There has to be water for the wildlife, she said.

At the park, said Mrs. Burtis, she and her husband have seen deer, turkey, owls, hawks, pheasant, skunks and great blue heron, and heard bobcats, so there's lots of wildlife to see.