

Kent COUNTY *Detail*

January/
February
2013

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Update: Multi-Jurisdictional Parks Study – Phase II

In September 2012, the Multi-Jurisdictional Parks Study was completed, which resulted in a report with several recommendations. One recommendation was to establish an independent Authority to implement projects such as a shared web-platform for reservations and programming, a common hiring system for instructors and officials, joint marketing to highlight our collective community assets, and the development of common metrics and reporting that better reflect locally available parks and recreation services.

Since that time, the Parks Study consultant and the staff of the Administrator's Office have presented the findings to the Urban Metro Mayors and Managers group as well as the Kent County Township Supervisors Association. We have contacted the local units to determine if there is any interest in moving ahead on the recommendations and participating in a workgroup to draft the necessary inter-local agreement and bylaws to form the Authority. At this point, no one is being asked to commit to the authority, only to be a part of the planning process. Once a draft framework is prepared, it is anticipated that it would be made available to all the local jurisdictions to determine if they want to participate. Phase II is expected to run from March through September 2013, and is being funded with grant dollars which were secured in 2012.

The final report as well as a copy of the presentation which was presented to the Kent County Board of Commissioners is posted online and can be accessed via:

http://www.accesskent.com/YourGovernment/BOC/citizen_comm_meeting.htm. If you would like additional information, please contact Assistant County Administrator, Mary Swanson via Mary.Swanson@kentcountymi.gov or 632-7578.



Health Department

Health Notes

A Service of the Kent County Health Department

January 2013 – Radon Action Month

Radon is a naturally-occurring radioactive gas found in rocks and soil. Colorless, odorless and tasteless, it can increase your risk of lung cancer. This silent killer enters buildings through cracks or openings in the foundation of floors and walls, around sump openings, or spaces around plumbing. Radon is found in both new and old homes, or houses built over a basement, over a crawlspace or built on slab-on-grade.



Homes in Michigan are almost twice as likely to have radon

Nearly one in eight homes in our state could have a radon problem. That's compared to the national average of one in fifteen. If you are living in an affected home, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends hiring a contractor that has the proper equipment and technical knowledge about radon mitigation. There is additional information at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/>.

Test your Home

This time of year, people may be getting the highest doses of radon with every indoor breath they take. That makes this time of year the best time to test your home for radon. The Surgeon General says radon is the second biggest cause of lung cancer in the United States, responsible for 20,000 new cases a year. Only cigarette smoking causes more lung cancer deaths. Double exposure to radon and cigarette smoke can further complicate risks.

Testing is quick and easy

The Kent County Health Department recommends testing homes for radon. You can do it yourself: hang a small filter in your home for about one week, and mail it for testing in a pre-paid envelope. You will receive the results within a few weeks.

Tests are available at the Kent County Health Department for just \$5 each. For more information, call (616) 632-6900.



**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**

Caring today for a healthy tomorrow



March Health Notes

A Service of the Kent County Health Department

March 2013 – Let Your Garden Grow!

Spring is just around the corner. Sunshine and warmer weather make the outdoors a much more welcome option for many of us! Now is a great time to start planning your very own garden.

Keep the nutrients, and save some money!

Home-grown vegetables are an inexpensive way to feed your family. You can prepare a garden for a fraction of what you pay for produce at a grocer. Seeds and fertilizers vary in price, and once you make the initial investment in tools, they can last years.

Fruits and vegetables provide a wealth of nutritional value, especially if they're consumed shortly after they're picked. When you buy produce that has been shipped, it can lose some of its nutritional value. According to the Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), broccoli shipped from California to Michigan can lose up to 50% of its vitamin C content.

Mental and Physical Benefits

Planting a garden, no matter what size, is a great way to spend some time outdoors and enjoy nature. Many gardeners say planting and tending to a garden helps soothe stress. Gardening can teach nurturing and improve self-esteem in children. Some studies show regular gardening helps fight dementia in older adults and weight bearing exercise like gardening is especially helpful in building bone density in women of all ages. The physical work of digging, raking, hoeing, and hauling supplies around the yard can burn 200-250 calories an hour!

Start planning now!

March is an ideal time to start preparing your outdoor soil for planting. Cool season crops such as peas, Bok Choy, radishes, lettuce and spinach can be planted in April and can then be sown in successive weeks afterwards to reap a continual harvest. Starting from the ground up, planning your garden should start with a soil test. The Michigan State University Extension provides an easy-to-use soil test kit that can be purchased online from the MSU Extension Bookstore (www.bookstore.msue.msu.edu) or from the Kent County MSU Extension office.

Talk with a Master Gardener

Even if you don't have a lot of space, you can still plant a garden. Master Gardeners can share tips on creating small gardens, window sill gardens for herbs, or square-foot gardens for a variety of veggies. MSU Extension Master Gardeners are available to help you by calling 888-678-3464. The toll-free Lawn & Garden Hotline is available every day from 9 a.m.-noon, or after April 15, daily from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (Additional information provided by Rebecca Finneran, Kent County MSUE)

Cooperative Extension

The 2013 Apple Crop - An Update

In a previous article for this publication, Amy Irish-Brown wrote about the early March warm up and the spring frost events that decimated the commercial fruit tree crops throughout West Michigan in 2012. Irish-Brown has compiled an update outlining where West Michigan is at for 2013 crop based on a somewhat similar weather pattern so far this winter. The warm weather over the weekend of January 12, 2013 had many wondering if we are on the same track for an early spring and more crop losses.

It should be noted that there were several events that fell into place to create the “perfect game” that led to the extreme tree fruit crop losses in 2012. Irish-Brown identified six strikes that added up to the knock out of our West Michigan tree fruit crops:

- Lake Michigan was much warmer than normal with almost no ice cover during the winter. The spring warm-up was more rapid as a result with less cooling influence than we experience in some years.
- The fall of 2011 was warmer than usual and was followed by a very mild 2011-2012 winter (4th mildest on record in Michigan). There were two global climate patterns that led to the unusual mild winter and early spring during 2012 - La Niña and the North Atlantic Oscillation. In particular, the North Atlantic Oscillation was persistently positive during much of the winter season, which effectively prevented cold, Arctic-origin air masses from moving southward into the central and eastern USA.
- There was little frost in the ground last winter and when the extremely warm weather came in mid-March 2012, fruit trees were tricked into believing spring was here to stay. Snow cover came early and was present during the coldest days of the season, effectively insulating the ground and leading to a frost line more shallow than usual.
- The string of warm days in Mid-March was a very unusual, rare event (unprecedented by most climatologic measures). Not only were the daytime high temperatures in the 80's for several days, but the nighttime low temps stayed above 60 – this really pushed tree growth to maximum levels. Mean temperatures for March of 2012 were the warmest on record, which led to the earliest recorded bud break for tree fruits.
- In the timeframe between late-March and the average end of spring frosts (mid-May), there is an average of 6 to 8 frost/freeze events for Kent County – for 2012, there were 22.
- The final two freeze events were extreme and really the deciding factor(s) in the extreme crop loss. Had the early warm March weather not occurred, the events in late April would still have caused some damage to tree fruits (perhaps 30 to 50% losses).

So, how does the fall and winter of 2012-2013 compare? Lake Michigan is warmer than normal for mid-January and as of this writing, there was very little ice on the big lake as well as inland lakes – strike one. While fall was a bit cooler than normal, again as of the writing of this article, winter thus far has been warmer than normal, but not as extreme as during the winter of 2011/2012 – HOWEVER – Michigan is not under the influences of the two global climate patterns this winter – ball one. As for the other four strikes listed, they have not been experienced yet and odds are they won't be – at least to the level of extremes that occurred in 2012. Until fairly recently, there was nearly no snow cover this winter so any cold weather has added nicely to the frost line in the ground. The temperatures for the latter half of January were colder and added even more to that frost line to curb any influence of warm days that have occurred thus far. And, while there have been some warm temperatures, the nighttime temperatures have continued to fall below freezing. Temperate tree fruits require a certain number of dormant hours to complete their bud development before any growth can occur – a term known as endodormancy. Those hours were never satisfied before the end of January, so a couple of 50 degree days in January or early February are not enough to push forward growth of fruit trees in Michigan.

In conclusion, the count is still one strike, one ball, out of the six influences that devastated the 2012 Michigan fruit tree crops so there is quite a while at bat yet before we know the final situation. Michigan fruit trees had a great rest in 2012, despite the drought conditions, so they should be more vigorous and healthy than ever – there are more fruit buds present than normally seen at this time. These facts will very likely lead to a home run for the 2013 fruit crop.

Parks Department



Millennium Park Hosts another 'First'

The first Groundhog's Day Marathon at Millennium Park was a huge success. More than 530 from 21 different states and Canada participated in the event on February 2. The event ran on the Park's Meijer Millennium Trail Network. Participants enjoyed the snow-covered trails and thought the setting was beautiful. Parks Department staff provided information to out-of-town runners on everything from additional trail routes to local breweries.

Throughout the next year, the department will be working with Experience Grand Rapids to help develop a methodology for determining the economic impact of such events, which are becoming more frequent as Millennium and other Kent County Parks become known as exceptional venues for such activities.

Parks Online Reservations

Last year, the Parks Departments began restructuring its website to offer additional online registration and payment opportunities. The process was designed to be phased in, beginning with campsites at Wabasis Lake Campground. In the past, campsite registration traditionally began on February 1, with Wabasis loyalists (particularly groups planning camping weekend events) lining up as early as two days before to get desired dates and sites.

This year, Parks Department staff notified any registrant from the past two years of the opportunity to sign up online and the response was overwhelmingly positive. The new online system ties directly into the accounting system, making it much more efficient for campers and staff. Within a short time, the Department received \$21,000 that previously would have required a separate invoicing process and delayed receipting. Now that the system is operational, reservations will be able to be made on a 'rolling basis,' up to six months in advance.



The County Detail is a compilation of news and information that helps fulfill our commitment to the residents of Kent County, and is distributed bi-monthly to local government officials. Editorial questions or submissions should be directed to Melanie Grooters, *County Detail* Editor.
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