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## Camp Kiwanis

**By Connie Beard**

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It's been 20 years in the making. Camp Kiwanis, a picturesque campsite on more than 70 acres, is situated on the northern shore of Pat Mayse Lake.

The location was originally a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers site known as Forest Point. Created in 1967 following construction of the reservoir, camping was rustic — no power connections, vault-type restrooms and water was available only through a hand pump. Forest Point was closed after several years and left to deteriorate.

The Kiwanis Club of Paris approached the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1989 about reopening the area as a private group facility. Under the leadership of Frank McHam, 1989-1990 club president, the club reached and signed an agreement in 1990 to restore the area. Camp Kiwanis was created with the goal to build a camp primarily for organized youth groups, which helps the group to fulfill its overall motto, "Serving the Children of the World."

Today the two loops of the camp ground are booked a year in advance. The area is used by the Boy Scouts, groups affiliated with Paris Junior College for backpacking and camping classes, fishing tournaments, church groups and families. Some utilize the facilities for annual reunions — and have for more than 15 years.

Kiwanis-related groups venture to the area for outings each summer, including Key Club (high school age), Builders Club (junior high) and several elementary school groups.

"We'll get a bunch of kids out for boat rides, cook them hot dogs and provide them a day out there. A lot have never been on a boat, never been fishing," said Darrell Hawkes, chairman of the Camp Kiwanis board of directors and lieutenant governor of Texas/Oklahoma Division 32.

"We do anything we can do to get kids outdoors. It's neat to see kids who have never fished. That's a lot of fun," Hawkes said.

Kiwanis Foundation board member Charles Christian said, "It fits in real well with what we're about. Through our youth leadership program, we work with them to help them succeed."

Christian talked about the camp site.

"It was a jungle when we first got it," Christian said. "It's taken thousands of volunteer man hours to get it in shape."

The foundation has made many improvements, the largest to date a 3,750-square-foot covered pavilion, which cost between \$25,000 and \$28,000, was completed in 1991. Electricity also was brought to the pavilion in addition to a water line for drinkable water.

Overall, the Kiwanis Foundation has invested close to \$250,000 — not counting volunteer hours, "which has been phenomenal," Hawkes said.

"It hasn't just been Kiwanians — innumerable business people helped us get to where we are," he said.

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Where they are, in terms of improvements include:

- Sand volleyball court, horse shoe pit and outdoor shower area with cold water (1991);
- A new restroom for Loop A with running water, toilets and private showers for men and women. Cost of this project was more than \$20,000 plus volunteer labor and donated materials (1995);
- A smaller 1,200-square-foot pavilion inside Loop B with water and electricity to provide additional camping areas with RV connections (1998); and
- An improved site for the camp manager with concrete RV pad, power, water, septic system, telephone and satellite TV connection (2005).

The Kiwanis Club Foundation is working toward further improvements to the area. Four phases have been mapped out in order to create an area usable year round.

Phase I, with an estimated cost of \$100,000, includes design and specifications of the facility, site survey, soil testing, clearing land and site preparation, grant writing assistance, utility upgrade study and related expenses for planning and preparation.

Phase II calls for the construction of a 9,600-square-foot lodge for year-round use, creating adequate parking for the facility, upgrading electrical and water infrastructure and installation of a new sewer system. Phase II is estimated at \$1.3 million.

Phase III will see the construction of a boat dock/fishing pier with canoes, paddle boats, nature trails with provided bicycles, improved roads, a rock climbing wall and cabins. The estimated cost of this phase is \$563,000.

Phase IV includes additional campsites, restroom and shower facilities and additional sports facilities. There are no cost estimates for this phase at this time.

Camp Kiwanis Foundation keeps the area in tip-top shape, and provides an onsite manager any time the facility is in use.

"This is the best maintained place on the lake. It's mowed every other week by Kiwanians," Christian said.

Hawkes added, "The facility is inspected every year by the Corps of Engineers and the local game warden has said we have the best boat ramp on the lake."

The foundations uses the fees from visiting groups to help offset the cost of maintenance, and the Kiwanis Club of Paris donates to the camp to make sure the facility is maintained.

A unique aspect of Camp Kiwanis is the space between camping sites. There are seven improved sites on Loop A, which include water and electricity, and four on Loop B. And there are many places to tent camp throughout the 70 acres.

"The sites aren't crowded, and it's a good, safe place for kids. It's just a really neat place," Christian said.

The facility only opens its gates to groups, which can rent one of the loops by day or by the weekend. Rates are posted on the website at [www.pariscampkiwanis.org](http://www.pariscampkiwanis.org), where a request for rental can also be filled out and sent.

Improvements would not have been possible without substantial gifts from innumerable businesses and in-kind monetary gifts over the years, including

assistance from such places as First Federal Community Bank, which has donated toward current improvements at the camp, which include upgrading all the camp spots on Loop A with concrete pads.

The major long-term goal is a new 9,600 square-foot lodge, which is planned for Loop B. The lodge will include a meeting area with four break-out rooms, a kitchen, office space for four counselors, separate restrooms for men and women and two dormitory areas. A fireplace in the main meeting room will also open to the front porch area. The lodge will also be air conditioned.

"People want the lodge, especially for family reunions," Hawkes said. "It's a dream — something that's really needed, some place for kids to meet and we can use it during the heat of summer and the cold of winter."

To further fund the future projects, the foundation has sent out several grant requests.

"We remain hopeful that several of them will make," Hawkes said.

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Publisher: Patrick Graham

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