Ohio State, City Year combine to build park

By Gabrielle Williamson
Lantern staff writer

The campus area will soon hear the pitter-patter of children at play thanks to a collaborative effort by a national service program, Ohio State and the surrounding community to build a recreation park on six acres of field at a local grade school.

Thursday, OSU President E. Gordon Gee announced at the groundbreaking ceremony that Ohio State will participate in the project by contributing $17,500. The park will be built at Indianaola Middle School, 420 E. 19th Ave.

The park will be constructed in five days, beginning June 10, primarily by volunteers consisting of OSU students and members of a national service program called City Year.

"It was expected that the university would become involved in a project like this. The university wants to see the area improved," said Steve Sterritt of City Year Partners, which is a university group established to work with the city and OSU community to improve the campus area.

The playground project materialized in only 60 days and was pioneered by City Year, which is a division of AmeriCorps that was founded in Boston in 1998.

The program consists of young people working in six cities across America to improve communities by doing tasks such as renovating homeless shelters and organizing after school programs.

Even though the playground will be used solely by children, the OSU community still benefits from the opportunity for everyone to work together during its construction, said Sara O'Brien, an OSU freshman from New Jersey.

"With the playground, people in the community will come together," O'Brien said.

O'Brien took a year off from classes to volunteer for City Year and said she learned more from working on the park project than she did during her freshman year in college.

She said approximately 25 OSU students will be among the hundreds who are volunteering to build the park that will include play and fitness areas, a jogging track, soccer field and outdoor education area.

The $26,500 playground still needs more funding despite an additional donation of $25,000 from the City of Columbus and $15,000 from grassroots fund-raising that included pancake breakfasts, haircutting marathons and spaghetti dinners, said O'Brien, a member of the fund-raising committee.

Columbus Mayor Greg Lasakika, Schools Superintendent Larry Nixson and President Gee each told the Indianaola student body that the project is an energy and morale booster to aid the community efforts to improve the area.

O'Brien said she agrees that the park will provide spirit but added that the playground will show people the product of community efforts.

"I think they see a vision but it's been difficult to communicate that," she said. "This is something tangible."

Sterritt said the park will represent work done by the community for the community, and hopes this will cause the immediate and surrounding areas to be better maintained.

"If people work together to build the park, then they will take care of it," Sterritt said.

Park construction will coincide with City Year's national conference to be held in Columbus at Indianaola Middle School from June 14 to 17.

Priscilla Butler, president of City Year, said it is appropriate that Columbus be the host of the national conference because the city has proven itself, through projects like the recreation park, to be committed to community service.

"These parks are symbols of the kind of community partnership that is at the heart of Columbus," Butler said.
City Year to aid Campus District

By Jeanette Drake

The New York Times called City Year "a service corps that works." And work is what they plan to do, bringing their idealism to work for the University District.

City Year is a community service corps of young adults ages 17-23, who provide human services partnerships and are part of the AmeriCorps National Service Network. Ohio State will host City Year's first national conference June 14-17, during which 66 volunteers from Columbus and hundreds more from across the country will build a park at Indiana Middle School, 420 E. 19th Ave.

City Year members chose Columbus as the first convention site "more than anything because of the strength of the community spirit," said Rachel Solotaroff, conference director from Boston.

The park-raising event was chosen as one of this year's three projects because "it is a great opportunity to involve the University in bringing students and residents together," Solotaroff said. Planners expect 1,300 participants.

City Year will transform the six acres at Indiana Middle School into a playground, cinder jogging track, four fitness stations, soccer field and an amphitheater. Work will begin June 10 and culminate with a major construction day June 15.

The $60,000 project would cost three times as much without donations and discounts from businesses and individuals, Solotaroff said. Financial support has come from the University, the city of Columbus and fund-raising events.

Campus Partners, a community redevelopment corporation established to improve the University District, is assisting City Year with fund-raising and financial management for the park project.

Staff, faculty and residents can be a part of City Year for a day — June 15. Construction for the park will kick off at 7:30 a.m. on the South Oval. Buses will transport volunteers to and from the park, and local restaurants will donate breakfast and lunch. Afterwards, they will celebrate with a Latin jazz band and more free food.

City Year still needs tools, concrete, tires, flowers, landscape materials and volunteers to work on various tasks. For more information or to contribute, call City Year at 224-5540.

By Jo McCutty

RAIN DOESN'T STOP groundbreaking ceremonies for a new park at Indiana Middle School. President Gee and Mayor Lashutka watch students and City Year members dig in June 1 for the cause. From left to right, the young people are: Jason Jenkins, Christy Ridgeway, Soklay Phen, Deli Calamese, Cherle Bondu rant, Jeremy Hovance, Marcialene Hardin and Don Glanton.
OSU fraternity honors star for achievements

By Dan Rapp
Lantern staff writer

L.A. Law and Just Cause star Blair Underwood was honored during a reception Saturday by Phi Beta Sigma fraternity at the Hale Black Cultural Center.

Underwood was made an honorary member of the fraternity at Carnegie-Mellon University in 1991.

Underwood was in Columbus to participate in City Year, a national youth service organization. City Year held its national conference at Ohio State on June 14-17.

Underwood is a national spokesman for City Year and participated in programs on and around campus. "We are congratulating our most celebrated brother, Blair Underwood, for his achievements in the entertainment industry," said fraternity President Cordell Dillon.

The fraternity presented Underwood with a plaque, a letter of commendation from the Ohio General Assembly and a small gift.

The reception was also meant to let Underwood get away from the busy parts of his day, Dillon said.

The fraternity is a social group committed to community service, said John Igwebuike, regional director of programs for the fraternity.

Underwood was a member of a panel discussion that addressed leadership in the next century.

"A leader is someone who is not apathetic and can pick an issue and move toward a goal," he said.

One of the most pressing issues facing leaders over the next several years is racism, and young people are going to be the ones responsible for fighting it, Underwood said.

"Young people are idealistic enough to see change," he said. "City Year is on the cutting edge of making change in this nation."

Underwood told the audience that in order to lead, they must think of others. "You have to have a consciousness of the people around you, not just you and yours," he said.

Underwood got involved with City Year because they are "making positive inroads into many of our social ills in our nation," he said.

"I think his efforts are commendable because he is taking time out of his very busy schedule to help out the community, and he has not forgotten where he comes from," said fraternity member Sam Johnson Jr.
Service to community can

tuition money for
year of help

By Jill Boatman
Lantern staff writer

A local service group is giving Ohio State students the opportunity to do work for the local community and earn money for tuition along with a paycheck.

City Year is a national youth service organization for people aged 17 to 23. Participants work full time for a year doing community service and gaining leadership development.

The group is currently recruiting new members to fill open positions.

“City Year offers tuition money for a year of help,” said Geoff Gray, a participant in the City Year program. “Not just racial diversity but different socioeconomic backgrounds. We have people working toward their GEDs, college graduates and people taking time off from school.”

Monday through Thursday, members work as teachers’ aids in schools, renovate housing for the homeless, and operate recreational programs for senior citizens and children. Fridays are devoted to education and leadership training.

really pay off

Corps members receive $4,725 for college tuition, job training after the program is complete, and a net salary of $125 a week.

“I think this is a perfect opportunity for someone who needs a break from school to take a year off,” said Mark Woods, a program participant and a former OSU student. “It’s an opportunity to take time off and still accomplish things you would never imagine you would accomplish.”

The name ‘City Year’ stems from the idea that young people should take a year and devote time for the needs of their community. Each participant must perform 1700 hours of community service to graduate from the program, Woods said.

“We have a person on staff who works on recruitment,” said Ruben Herrera, executive director of the Columbus staff. “There is an interview process. We accept members around September but now we are accepting mid-year participants.”

The group is sponsored by many corporations including the Timberland Co., Bank One of Columbus, The Limited, and National City Bank.

“It’s a good program,” said Ara Rao, a program participant and graduate from OSU. “It allows you to empower yourself and in turn empower other people.”