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Assunpink Creek gets cleaned during East Trenton block party

By Sulaiman Abdur-Rahman, The Trentonian

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TRENTON >> The blighted East Trenton neighborhood became cleaner and more fun Saturday as local organizations hosted a block party while beautifying the area.

With the Sierra Club of New Jersey removing debris from the Assunpink Creek and girls from the Lawrence Ewing Trenton Girl Scouts planting sycamore trees in George Page Park, “The visible difference is really tremendous,” scout leader and city resident Kassia Switlik Bukosky said. “It’s fantastic. I think each organization has done their part and found their niche.”

The East Trenton Collaborative organized the creek cleanup and adjacent Taylor Street block party as part of its 2018 Spring Kick-off. The collaborative, also known as ETC, comprises a group of residents and organizations who work together to improve the quality of life in this working-class North Ward neighborhood tucked between Route 1 and Assunpink Creek.

“We are calling it the Spring Kick-off,” ETC community organizer Elena Peebles said, “because we want it to be coming out of winter and showing what things can happen in East Trenton in the summer months ahead. It’s turning out to be a beautiful day.”

The event promoted youth recreation as kids jumped inside an inflatable bounce house, kicked soccer balls and practiced their golf swings at George Page Park near the intersection of North Clinton and North Olden avenues.

“This is our park; it belongs to us; it behooves us to keep it clean,” said Vince Blasse of Play Soccer Nonprofit International. He works with children in the Trenton Public Schools and sees soccer as a vehicle that can reinforce responsibility and positive engagement.

“It’s more than soccer,” Blasse said. “We use soccer so we can talk to them.”

In addition to the children’s activities at George Page Park, city youth Saturday afternoon also had the opportunity to walk on stilts and play table tennis at a vacant lot off Taylor Street.

“This is a part of the city that does not get a lot of attention,” ETC consultant Iana Dikidjieva said of Taylor Street, a blighted three-block roadway in need of reconstruction.

Something of an eyesore, Taylor Street as of Saturday could be described as an industrial wasteland, but a newly restored greenspace on the 100 block showed recreational promise.

Trenton City Council last year awarded a \$770,500 contract to Wild Heart Industries LLC of Hillsborough to demolish an industrial building at 104-108 Taylor St. and to conduct hazardous materials abatement and site restoration on that parcel. The remediated landscape served as a nice backdrop Saturday as children played in the adjacent vacant lot, which Isles and Trenton Circus Squad turned into a makeshift park for the day.

“We’re trying to get the idea that this can be more than a vacant lot,” Isles project manager Chris Shimchick said. “This place could be a pavilion someday.”

With Trenton’s May 8 municipal election quickly approaching, several candidates attended Saturday’s Taylor Street block party, including mayoral hopeful Reed Gusciora and council at-large candidates Rachel Cogsville-Lattimer and Elvin Montero.

Multifaceted Trenton artist Bentrice Jusu demonstrated her trusty photography skills at the block party, taking portraits of passers-by to “capture history and preserve history.”

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