

## Parks to benefit from county contribution

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 24 March 2023 04:24

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A shiny new swing set, fencing for a natural grass ball field and shade for spectators are on tap for a few of the community's parks, thanks to a \$100,000 contribution from McKinley County to the City of Gallup.

It started with Mentmore resident Lucy Saucedo, who's lived across the street from Hadden Park for 23 years. Most of the swings there were removed around 1990 for safety reasons and never replaced, Parks and Recreation Director Vince Alonzo said.

Saucedo's seen her own grandchildren, who live two blocks away, and other neighborhood kids playing on "the one little [swing] set" there. She raised the issue with Alonzo and District 3 Commissioner Robert Baca, who asked his colleagues for money for more swings.

"I made two calls and it happened. I talked to Vince and then I talked to Bobby Baca. They got together and the county gave funds...and figured out how to get some playground equipment in there," Saucedo said.

The county commission approved the money – \$25,000 for each city council district to use on parks – last October. The funds came through a couple of weeks ago. That may not seem like much against park needs of \$43 million, but every little bit helps, and \$25,000 per district is enough to make a noticeable improvement. The trick is getting bang for the buck.

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For Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, it put a \$40,000 swing set for Hadden Park in reach, when she added some of her district discretionary funds.

“Vince upgraded the landscaping last year,” Palochak noted. “Last year I spent money on the Sports Complex to add shaded areas for people to sit and picnic, because they would sit in the ball field in their own chairs and they had no shade.”

Shade will be the order of the day, or spring, at TDFL Park in Councilor Linda Garcia’s District 1 this year.

“Some of it will go to getting some sun shades. I don’t know if that [amount’s] going to be enough or too much,” Garcia said.

Alonzo said city construction crews will build four 12-ft. -by-18-ft. shelters with metal roofs for spectators at TDFL Park – two for the home team and two for visitors.

Alonzo was already planning to try to restore a baseball field at Indian Hills Park with natural grass, an effort to get a few more seasons out of a field that’s well worn. Councilor Michael Schaaf’s District 2 allotment will go to putting a fence around the field, which will be out of service while the grass is growing.

Artificial turf is expensive and Alonzo thinks by “crowning” the field – building up the height before replanting grass – he’ll be able to fix drainage issues so rainwater will run off the field, rather than flooding the middle.

Dist. 3 Councilor Sarah Piano said she’s not heard much from her constituents about specific park issues and is open to suggestions for how to spend her share. After all, community contact has been at the heart of this effort.

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“I had a community member call me and say ‘our park is falling apart, we need some help,’ ” Baca said. That led to his conversations with Alonzo, which he hopes are the first of a larger effort.

“I represent the city. I just need people to talk to me so I can see where I can help. We should be looking at our projects together to see what we can do,” Baca said. “If it’s possible, I want to keep something like that going....[what’s] good for the city is good for the county and what’s good for the county is good for the city.”

All of these improvements would have had to wait another year or more without the county’s largesse. Now most of them should go in during April and May, Alonzo said. But grass grows at its own speed.

Saucedo is humble about her effort and will be glad to see the new swing set. She encourages other residents to contact their representative with issues.

“I spoke to the right people,” she said. “You just gotta speak to the right people.”

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