



# North End Connection

The Newsletter of the Creston Neighborhood Association

Fall 2013

## Vote Yes! for Grand Rapids parks

By: Deborah Eid

CNA supports and endorses the YES! GR Parks millage and urges you to vote Yes on November 5.

“We want to attract new residents and home buyers to the Creston neighborhood and having our parks facilities updated and in good repair with clean, open restrooms and drinking fountains along with new recreational opportunities will improve on a huge asset we already enjoy on the North End,” said CNA board member Glenn Disosway when describing the CNA endorsement of this YES GR Parks millage.

Within our boundaries the Creston neighborhood has the most green space in the city: Riverside, Aberdeen, Briggs, Huff and Sweet St. Parks. That is why several hundred of our neighbors have joined together to renovate three public playgrounds in the last four years, investing our own money and time to update these play spaces with the help of the KaBoom! organization.

Neighbors who are active in CNA’s Living Green in Creston committee have planted Grand Rapids’ first three urban orchards in public parks and perennial edible thickets at Aberdeen. They have also done other

tree plantings and mapping, created a butterfly garden at Briggs and organized garlic mustard pulls at Huff Park to control this invasive plant.

Our current parks system, however, has fallen into a state of mediocrity and decline. The system is saddled with antiquated playgrounds, leaking, closed, or obsolete pools, and a substantial backlog of basic rehabilitation needs. This is not the future we want for our neighborhood or the legacy we intend to pass on to our future generations.

The *Yes! GR Parks* proposal on the November 2013 ballot is a smart, short-term (7 year) property millage that will dedicate funding to repair and improve our neighborhood parks and provide recreation facilities for our community.

By fixing our neighborhood parks and playgrounds and keeping the pools open for a longer summer season (10-12 weeks) we



Photo Courtesy: Yes! GR Parks

Hillcrest Park, located at Benjamin and Lyon, is one of many Grand Rapids parks that could benefit from improvements.

will strengthen our community, improve our property values, and provide our children and grandchildren with safe and healthy places to play, learn, and grow. Bottom line, great neighborhoods need great parks.

Want to learn more? Visit [www.yesgrparks.org](http://www.yesgrparks.org)



# Living Green: Help save the Monarchs

By: Caroline

How many butterflies—monarchs, for example—did you see this summer? Chances are you saw far fewer butterflies than in previous summers. Butterflies have been on the decline for several years now, but I began looking into why the monarch decline has been sudden and drastic this year.

The Monarch Watch website reports that the area where monarchs overwinter has declined 59% from the area occupied last winter. The number of monarch colonies was the smallest since 1975, when the colonies were first monitored.

Several factors have contributed to this decline: first milkweeds are the only plants on which monarchs will lay their eggs. Milkweed (pictured below)



in the corn and soybean fields has been largely eliminated due to the use of GMO seed containing herbicides.

Planting corn and soybeans for use as biofuels has increased

25.5 million acres since 2006, add to this the practice of excessive mowing and herbicide use in managing roadside areas, and it's not hard to figure out that less milkweed means fewer monarchs.

Second, Oyamel fir forests in Mexico are the only places where monarchs overwinter. Deforestation of these forests has destroyed monarch habitat; it's not hard to figure out that habitat destruction means fewer monarchs.

Third: extreme weather directly impacts monarch migration. March 2012 was the warmest recorded since nationwide record keeping began in 1895. Warm weather encourages returning monarchs to fan out across the country rapidly, but cooler April temperatures in the north causes developmental delay reducing both life span and number of eggs each female lays.

That's the bad news; here's the good news: Living Green in Creston is currently in the process of making the butterfly garden at Briggs Park into a Monarch Waystation. Mon-



Photo courtesy: National Geographic

arch waystations provide milkweed, nectar plants and shelter for monarchs throughout their annual cycle and helps to assure their continued migration in North America.

For information on making a monarch waystation of your own and other ways you can help visit [Monarchwatch.org](http://Monarchwatch.org).



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# Thank you for another successful car show

It may have been slightly more damp than anticipated, but the 9th annual Creston Car show was still a great success. We would like to extend our thanks to all of the sponsors for making the event possible.

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Photo by: Pete Tabberer

CNA neighbors dodge raindrops while looking at the cars at the 9th annual Creston Car Show on Saturday, September 7, 2013.

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Thank you also to our media partner WGUV Real Oldies for providing music; the owners of the cars; and you, the neighbors, without whom this event would not be possible.



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# Riverside renovations beginning soon

By: Pete Tabberer

Riverside Elementary, located at 2420 Coit, first opened in 1954 but has been vacant since it closed in 2010. Plans to redevelop the former school building into a senior care facility have been in the works for nearly two years.

After several delays the project is expected to begin by the end of the year. Here is what State Representative Winnie Brinks reported on the project in her July newsletter:

I'm happy to announce, alongside the Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF), a project that will supply our community with 50 new jobs and a multimillion-dollar capital investment.

The project will renovate a former Grand Rapids school building that is no longer in service to become Riverside Senior Care, a licensed senior care facility for 55 residents. As it stands, the former elementary building is functionally obsolete - replacing it with a building capable of housing a new business will provide opportunities to Grand Rapids residents.

The development sits on a 7-acre site and will maintain most of the existing walking paths and mature landscaping.



Photo by: Pete Tabberer

The former Riverside Elementary School will soon become a retirement home.

The project is being taken on by the city of Grand Rapids Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and will use just more than \$1 million in school and local tax capture. It is expected to yield a total capital investment of \$7 million and create 42 full-time and 8 part-time jobs in the area. I'm confident that Riverside Senior Care will be a great addition to our city. It is a forward-moving step for Grand Rapids!

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# My furnace adventure, Part One

By: Sharon Zils

Please excuse me for borrowing the title of the spaghetti Western classic starring Clint Eastwood and Eli Wallach, but when you get to the end of this story, you'll understand why. My home owner drama began during the record breaking cold snap the weekend after Mother's Day. It deserves to be called: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Let's start with the bad. It was a cold, dark, and stormy night. Wait, not stormy. Furthermore, I'm not Snoopy and I'm not writing this from the top of a dog house. But it was a cold Friday night. I was reading the Grand Rapids Press at the dining room table, wearing the hood up on my sweatshirt (because who turns on the furnace in May!?) when my married-no-longer-lives-with-me daughter's 15 ½ year old cat who still lives-with-me (you all

know why) came up to me meowing pitifully. Anyway, I took pity on her and got up to look at the thermostat...whoa...57 degrees...ok, then...click.

By Saturday morning the house had warmed to 62, and I didn't have to be at work until 3pm. So I went down to the basement to clean up after the historic April flood. I had no idea where anything was and, more importantly, the laundry needed to be done. I was excavating boxes in the opposite corner of the basement from the noisy appliances. The washer had just begun its cycle and the dryer was also running when I heard the furnace fan turn on. Later, the washer stopped, the dryer buzzed and I heard the fan still running. With dread, I walked to the furnace. Just as I had suspected: stone cold. I pulled the cover to look at the igniter: dead.

I did a quick mental scan of

my financial situation: only \$300 in savings, just enough in checking to cover the current bills and the next pay check a week away. I wasn't calling my furnace guy on the big bucks weekend emergency charge, so I unboxed my little electric heater and borrowed two more. I was going to tough it out. The temperature dropped even lower that night (Google it, if you doubt me), but the cat in her fur coat and me wearing triple layers, survived.

Fast forward to Monday afternoon, Frank confirmed my diagnosis and the heat exchanger was cracked to boot. Naturally, the furnace had a 20 year warranty that had just expired. Not good. I was in a panic, financial that is. What was I going to do? I thought I could borrow some money from my sister, but when Frank's estimate came in just under \$2500, I knew that was too

See: Furnace, pg. 7

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# Local History: North Park Bridge

By: Pete Tabberer

From 1884 until 1903 northern Grand Rapids and the City of Walker were connected by a wooden bridge at North Park Street. In 1903 this bridge was destroyed during flooding on the Grand River and within a year, a new “through Pratt truss” style bridge was built in its place.

For 88 years, the North Park Bridge faithfully did its duty of providing vehicles and pedestrians a way across the Grand River. It was upgraded for heavier loads in the 1930s, and paved in the 1960s. On the whole, the bridge led a fairly uneventful life.

Then, inspections in the mid-1980s revealed extreme deterioration which would require costly upgrades and repairs. The bridge was closed to all traffic in September 1988. This is where its life got interesting.

Plans called for the bridge to be demolished, sold for scrap and then replaced by the four lane concrete bridge that we see to-

day. Local preservationists fought hard against this plan.

The North Park Bridge, at 589 feet, was the longest Pratt truss style bridge in Michigan and was thus eligible for the register of historic places. To get on the list the Grand Rapids City Commission

had to acknowledge its historical significance, which they were reluctant to do.

The bridge had no notable people or events associated with it and it was very similar in both age and style to the Sixth Street Bridge which had already been preserved and crossed the river on a much less traveled road.

Preservationists eventually won over State and Federal au-

thorities who decreed that no state or federal funding would be provided for a new bridge unless the old one was somehow preserved.

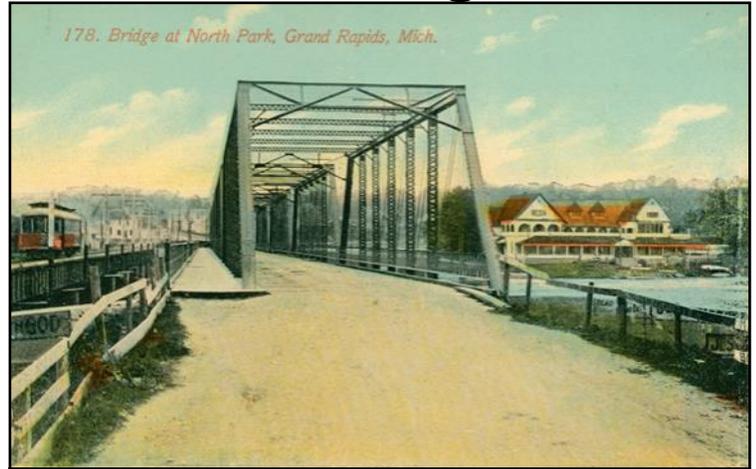
A compromise was eventually reached: one 116 foot span would be moved to Riv-

erside Park where it would be converted to a pedestrian bridge.

Demolition began in April of 1991 and in March a piece of the bridge was floated downriver on barges and deposited in the park. The city was reluctant to continue with the project and the parks officials were unwilling to spend money on maintenance. So, for eight years it cluttered up the park, rusting quietly, cut off from the public by a chain link fence.

Finally the Federal Highway Administration pressured the cities of Walker and Grand Rapids into holding up their end of the bargain and the bridge was, at last, installed across one of the canals in Riverside Park, where it is enjoyed by pedestrians and cyclists to this day.

It eventually even got the historic marker that the preservationists so desperately wanted. It can be seen in a small kiosk near the south end of the bridge.



178. Bridge at North Park, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Photo courtesy: Grand Rapids Public Library (78-3-20)

The North Park Bridge as it looked shortly after it was built. The North Park Pavilion can be seen on the other side of the River as well as a street car bridge that once crossed the river nearby.



Photo courtesy: Grand Rapids Public Library (132-2)

In 1991 one 116 foot span of the North Park Bridge was floated downstream to Riverside Park.



Photo courtesy: Grand Rapids Public Library (273-P7)

The preserved section of the bridge at Riverside Park in November 1992. It remained fenced for eight years before its conversion to a pedestrian bridge.



Photo by: Pete Tabberer

The old North Park Bridge as it looks today crossing a canal in the northern end of Riverside Park.

**Furnace, cont. from pg. 6**

much to ask. This leads me to the good part of my story.

A couple of options for home owners who need emergency furnace repairs or replacements *and* who can pay for it, there are the many area heating/cooling companies or DTE Energy technicians. But for those of us who are the “working poor,” living pay check to pay check with no cash reserves, there is the City of Grand Rapids Housing Rehabilitation Program.

I was born, raised and have lived in Grand Rapids almost all of my adult life, but never knew this program existed. My sister and her husband from whom I

couldn't borrow money were the ones who sent me the information on the program. And boy, am I glad they did...not only was a new 95%+ efficient furnace installed, but double hung vinyl windows replaced my original late 1920s wooden windows.

So that is the “ugly” of my saga.

Next issue, I'll relate the timeline of the process from filling out an application to waving goodbye to the contractor and his crew. So if you are a Grand Rapids resident, a

home owner, low income and need some housing rehab, go to [www.grcity.us/communitydevelopment/Pages/Housing-Rehabilitation-and-Grant-Program-Administration.aspx](http://www.grcity.us/communitydevelopment/Pages/Housing-Rehabilitation-and-Grant-Program-Administration.aspx) to get started. Or call them (616) 456-3030 and an application can be sent to your address.

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# Public safety: Watch out for potential victims

By: Mac Brown

I have spoke often in the past about ways to identify and react to suspicious activity on your block. Hopefully, most of our neighbors recall these talks. If not, please contact me for a refresher. We go over this information with the hope that neighbors will be equipped to recognize this suspicious behavior and prevent a future crime. This time, instead of focusing on potential suspects we will focus on the potential victim.

The approach to keeping you and your home safe has always been one of personal responsibility. Keep your doors and windows locked, leave exterior lights on at night, keep valuables hidden from

sight, and don't allow landscaping to become overgrown and snow to pile up in the winter. Keeping up on these things has proven to lessen the potential of your home being burglarized.

The same goes for being robbed when you are outside your home. By being aware of your surroundings, reducing distractions from electronics, and taking well lit routes, you reduce your potential for being victimized. Let's make this approach not only a personal responsibility, but a community responsibility as well.

Take a look around your block for those homes that may not be following these techniques or for pedestrians that could use an extra eye of support. I'm not asking

you to police your block by enforcing what is right and what is wrong in regards to crime prevention. That is my job and as a resource I am available to advise you on personal and property protection here at CNA. But instead of just keeping a watch out for the potential trouble maker, let's make sure we are keeping a watch out for his potential victim as well.



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# Editors Corner: Parks and why I love them

By: Pete Tabberer

Although we don't get to do it very often, my wife and I love back country camping on North Manitou Island. The island, part of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, is located several miles offshore west of the little town of Leland, Michigan.

Today the island is almost entirely wilderness, but in the past it was an isolated yet thriving community complete with two towns, railroads, farms, and vacation cottages.

Visitors may, armed only with a map and a sense of adventure, strike out into the woods and find the remnants of those bygone days. You can find ruined farmhouses, crumbling foundations, old railroad grades and overgrown apple orchards. Somewhere there is a clearing where, decades ago, a logging company parked a bunch of trucks. The trucks are still there if you know where to look. These relics of the

past are one of the primary reasons I love visiting Sleeping Bear Dunes, and North Manitou in particular.

I love Grand Rapids' parks as well, but for entirely different reasons. Our parks have playgrounds, basketball courts, ball diamonds, swimming pools, and paths where my wife and I can take a leisurely shaded stroll. Our parks are wonderful places where my friends and family can spend a relaxing day outdoors.

It has become clear in recent years that the city is struggling to keep the parks maintained. The basketball hoops without nets, backstops choked by ivy, and infrequently mowed paths are all evidence of this.

My active imagination sees a future in which our parks begin to resemble North Manitou: a neglected ruin where traces of playgrounds and swimming pools can only be found if one knows where and how hard to look. There are a handful of parks that

are already well down that path.

And that is the reason I plan to vote yes on the upcoming Yes! GR Parks millage, and think you should too. I am willing to pay a



Photo Courtesy: nps.gov

The remains of the Blossom cottage are one of many ruins adventurous visitors can find on North Manitou island.

few extra dollars to help keep our parks in the condition they deserve. While I love the wilderness and adventure found on North Manitou, I would prefer that it stay there.

## Yard waste drop-off Information

Not everyone has a yard waste cart and the cost of yard waste bags can add up quickly. Neighbors looking for another way to dispose of leaves, brush, and tree branches have another option.

Residents can drop off yard waste free of charge at 2001 Butterworth SW. The site is open Monday through Saturday from 9 am to 4:45 pm from April to mid December. You will need to show a valid ID proving Grand Rapids residency.

Neighbors should also remember that the city does not allow leaves to be swept into the street because they clog the storm drains, cause flooding and contribute to water pollution.

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**North End Connection**  
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Board meets the 4th Thursday of most months. 6:30 pm @ CNA offices.

**The North End Connection**

is a community newsletter published 4 times a year with a circulation of 1000 and is distributed in various local businesses. Advertising space is available. Contact our office for rate information.

**The North End Connection** is produced by volunteers and published by the Creston Neighborhood Association. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the staff, Board of Directors or membership of the association.

CNA is partially funded by the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Block Grant and Justice Assistance Grant Funded Programs.

**Volunteer Opportunities at CNA**

Volunteers are important to the Creston Neighborhood Association! If you would like to get involved, here are some areas where you can help.

**YES! Count me in:**

- Communication Committee:** Promote the work of CNA through writing, photography, and graphic design.
- Volunteer and Membership Committee:** Encourages participation in CNA.
- Fundraising Committee:** Plans & implements events to sustain CNA services and programs
- Living Green in Creston:** Promotes the environmental health of the Creston neighborhood

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Nov. 21st - CNA Board Mtg. 6:30pm,  
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Happy Holidays!

Please Join us on the Creston Neighborhood Association Facebook page for updates.



**Fall 2013**

**North End Connection**