

# Coleman Park makes friends

**A group was formed to raise funds and help with projects at the 100-acre city park.**

*By JOHN LATIMER Staff Writer*

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Jim Polczynski, vice president of the recently formed Friends of Coleman Park, stands in front of ruins of the old North Lebanon Iron Furnace, recently exposed in Coleman Park. (LEBANON DAILY NEWS JOHN LATIMER)

An energetic and dedicated group of volunteers is lending support to Coleman Memorial Park. To answer a call for help from the park's seven-member board of trustees, The Friends of Coleman Park quietly organized about a year ago, said vice-president Jim Polczynski. Its purpose is to raise funds and build an army of volunteers to help with projects and upkeep at the 100-acre park situated on land that was deeded to Lebanon by the Coleman and Brock families 75 years ago.

"The idea goes back at least 8 years," Polczynski said. "The board knew it didn't have the manpower -- they are all overworked as is -- they didn't have the time or ability to be able to take on anything more. So by forming the friends, we could bring some additional energy and input into the whole experience."

A core group of members, including president and former trustee Rosemarie Christianson, current trustee and treasure Irv Siegel, and secretary Lauri Witters, have spent the past year with Polczynski establishing the organization as a viable arm of the park. So far, it has about 70 members, most of whom were recruited by a mailer sent to individuals who had already contributed time or money to the park.

Now the time is right to recruit more members, Polczynski said.

"We are just in the very beginning stages of trying to build a good volunteer staff for the various projects," he said. "We wanted to build an infrastructure that could support more people being involved. ... I think we have some muscle in our organization now, so we can actually begin to accomplish some of our objectives."

The organization's current goal is to invite golfers to enter a fundraising tournament that will be held April 25 at Lebanon Country Club. The purpose of the tournament is to raise enough money to build a playground at the park's baseball fields. For more information, call Polczynski at 679-0701.

The group has other, loftier ambitions -- including building a hiking trail to encircle the park and establishing an educational program for the benefit of local schools -- but its leaders are wise enough to know that making major improvements to the park will not happen overnight, primarily because they will take large amounts of funding.

Thus far, the friends organization has focused its efforts on projects that take more sweat equity than real equity, Polczynski said.

The most visible example is the work that has been done clearing the ruins of the North Lebanon Iron Furnace on the park's southern slope, near the nature trail. Groups of volunteers, including participants in the Renaissance Crossroads program, have lent a big hand in clearing the area, which has exposed a previously hidden brick wall.

"If you would have stood here a year ago and looked down, you wouldn't have seen any of the structures that are there," Polczynski said. "Eventually, we would like to put up some historical signage that explains the furnace."

Siegel said the board of trustees is grateful for the friends group, some of whose members have played a significant role in developing the park's Master Site Plan --an ambitious vision for making improvements to the park in the coming decades. In the future the group will also play an important role in fundraising for those improvements, he said.

The organization's volunteers will also make possible projects that the only full-time employee, caretaker Craig Henninger, could not have accomplished on his own, Siegel said.

"The board (of trustees) is mainly for policy making and organizing finances," Siegel said. "By having a fundraising arm and a strong base of volunteers to call on, it will make the park stronger."

There are several levels of membership to the Friends of Coleman Memorial Park, from the \$5 student membership, to the \$25 individual and \$35 family memberships. There is also a corporate membership available for \$100. Members receive a quarterly newsletter and discounts on pavilion rentals and merchandise sold by the park. All members are also invited to an annual membership and volunteer picnic.

To become a member visit [www.colemanmemorialpark.org](http://www.colemanmemorialpark.org) and click on the Friends of Coleman Park link.

[johnlatimer@ldnews.com](mailto:johnlatimer@ldnews.com); 272-5611, ext. 149