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## Downtown Coalition gets grant for pocket park

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This outhouse themed birdhouse is currently occupied, or at least appears to be, as nesting materials stick out the front. The birdhouse is one of many in the pocket park in downtown Angola.

Ashlee Hoos

ANGOLA — In most times, people flock to downtown Angola’s restaurants, movie theater, shops and pocket park for some hometown fun.

Soon, the yet-to-be-named pocket park — located at the corner of North Martha Street and East Maumee Street — will get some enhancements thanks to a Quick Impact Placebased Grant through the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

The grant was awarded to the Downtown Angola Coalition, which is Angola’s Main Street Organization, and will be administered by its board.

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“The grant allows for the creation of a pollinator garden, container gardens, educational signage, mural sidewalks and lights in the trees,” said DAC President Colleen Everage. “This project will have six months to complete with options for adjustments based on COVID-19 restrictions.”

The grant, said Everage, was awarded in part by a point system with extra points if the receiving organization was a Main Street like the DAC.

The grant was for \$5,000 and goes with a \$8,800 in in-kind donations from partners and a financial commitment from Cameron Memorial Community Hospital to support Metropolitan School District of Steuben County students in their efforts to create some container gardens for the park.

“The goal of this grant was to make the pocket park an inviting and magical space for the public during the day and early evenings,” said Everage.

One of the first efforts to make the goal a reality is the community birdhouse trees in the park. Currently, there are more than 40 birdhouses in the trees sponsored by community members and area businesses. That project was in conjunction with Angola Rotary and raised \$350 for Cahoots Coffee Cafe.

Partners, educators and public supporters on the project include the Purdue Extension and Master Gardeners, Blue Heron Ministries, Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District, Sherwin Williams, The Herald Republican, Everage Tree Service, Everage Auto, Prairie Heights High School Art Department, MSD of Steuben County teachers Marie Barge and Neasa Kalme, Cameron Memorial Community Hospital, Cahoots Coffee Cafe, RISE Inc., Steuben County Tourism Bureau, Angola Economic Development, and artists Cheryl Kellert, Elton Bishop and Genna Davis along with the Mayor’s Arts Council.

“This wasn’t a quick decision,” Everage said. “Its planning has taken several years.”

In 2018 during the Angola Arts Festival, a charrette was held, executed by local architect Tammeron Jones-Francis where community members drew pictures of what they envisioned the park to be.

Those visions were considered for the overall concept and were submitted with the original grant application.

When community needs assessments were done in 2017 and 2018 during the Hometown Collaboration Initiative, data collected showed arts and culture as both a want and need in Steuben County.

“As part of this pocket park project, the sidewalks will have murals and painted park benches completed by high school students, Cahoots and RISE clients as they work with mural artist-in-residence Cheryl Kellert,” Everage said. “Another art feature will be a creation of an art piece by artist Elton Bishop along with Genna Davis, who will be a freshman studying art at the University of Saint Francis.”

Steuben County Soil and Water along with Purdue Extension and Blue Heron Ministries will design and oversee pollinator garden installation to reduce non-point source water pollution, educate the community on pollinator gardens and add refuge for pollinators.

The park will be identified, Everage said, as part of a garden walk in the downtown area that connects between three existing rain gardens and is in close proximity to the hospital's healing garden.

Students of Kalme and Barge will work to create container gardens. The park will serve as an outdoor classroom.

“None of this would be happening if it were not for the individuals involved with the various organizations, schools and state entities,” Everage said. “Everyone has worked very hard already and it’s going to be a lot of fun to watch the park unfold. The news of this grant is so very much appreciated, thank you and I look forward to working together”

A name the park contest with KPC Media Group will take place in conjunction with the 2020 Arts Festival.

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