

LIFESTYLES

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METROCREST NEWS



THIS OLD FOREST

□ Staff, volunteers add visitor center to Elm Fork

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News Staff Writer

Tucked away in a remote area of Carrollton is a tract of land that has become a refuge for world-weary people wanting to escape to peace, tranquility and nature.

And now, thanks to efforts of city staff and volunteers, there is a newly-completed information center in the preserve.

"Not only will the high schoolers and grade schoolers be able to use it, but those who study at home will as well," said assistant parks manager Bob Schantz of the Carrollton Parks Department. "When we get the building done, you'll be able to go inside, talk to somebody, and find out what kinds of birds are out there right now."

The Elm Fork Nature Preserve sits on 49 acres at the eastern extension of the McLennan Park

□ Carrollton □

Sports Complex one mile west of Interstate 35, off of Sandy Lake Road. It is designed to remain in its natural setting for the study of North Texas plant and animal life.

The environment is home to a surprising variety of indigenous species. The preserve's grassy meadows are inhabited by many types of wildflowers. Cedar elms, willows and other native trees give shade and security to raccoons, egrets and even blue herons.

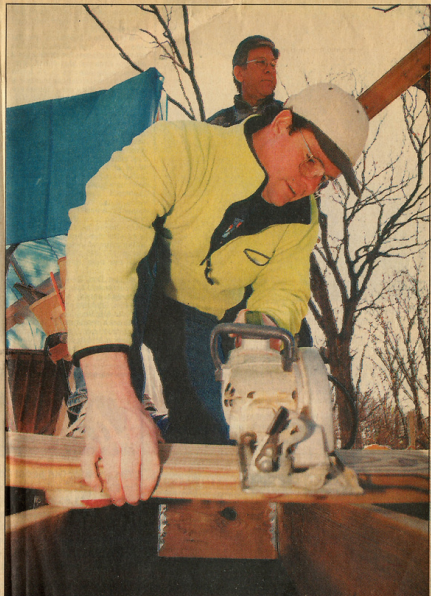
"We envision the preserve as a gathering place where people can learn about nature," said Schantz. Elm Fork is jointly operated by the city parks and recreation department and the Dallas County Open Space Board. Funding for the nature center, trails and other amenities are not provided by governmental coffers primarily, but

rather from private donations. Thanks mostly to those donations, the information center, which would have normally cost around \$100,000 to construct, could be built for about \$23,000, said to Schantz. He said the building may be ready by the end of spring.

That is in addition to the massive amount of volunteer work that has built trails, bridges, benches, and many more projects. An area church group of more than 500 worked one Saturday last year, and at least 45 Boy Scouts have volunteered at the preserve.

Ultimately, Elm Fork will be a sort of outdoor laboratory. Nature trails, a visitor's center, a library and many study areas will combine to create a place where people can learn about much of the environ-

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LONNIE ERICKSON, MetroCrest News

Carrollton Recreation Manager Bob Swafford, left, and Parks Manager Tony Chrisman, above, put in some time working on the Elm Fork Nature Preserve's new visitor center. The nearly-completed structure is pictured at the top.