

## Monthly Parks Department update July/August

Midsummer events have been at the forefront of Parks Department activities over the last two months. The department's summer camp series included nine full or part time camps for children age Pre-K to 8th grade. These camps are designed to offer children of the community a variety of activities to choose from with instruction from qualified coaches at a low or no cost. There were approximately 350 participants in the camp series this year, and around 30 junior coaches volunteering their time to make the camps an enjoyable experience for everyone. Swim lessons just recently concluded at Sandy Pond Beach, which are Red Cross certified and overseen by Waterfront Director Heidi Januskiewicz and program coordinator Jillian Folger. We consider ourselves very fortunate to have such accomplished instructors as Jillian, Ross Cote, Molly Cadogan (who also coaches the basketball and softball camps) and Jenn McGrath out there each morning and evening teaching these sessions. Most students return each season to work their way up through the six levels in this fun and instructive setting. There have also been numerous individual events at Pirone and Sandy Pond this summer, including tournaments, corporate events and birthday parties. Many local citizens and businesses have taken advantage of the opportunity to reserve field space for these events, which is generally available at no charge to Ayer residents.

The summer months are also a time for projects, and several are underway or near completion. The bioretention cell at Pirone Park is complete, and will now funnel storm water flowing out of the main parking lot through a drainage system that will allow the water to dissipate without eroding the hill leading down to the lower fields. The drainage system is also aesthetically pleasing, including a rain garden on the surface with perennials planted throughout. The RFP for the new maintenance/office building at Pirone is currently being put together by an architect, who will be reviewing the concept put together by Building Inspector Charlie Shultz.

Requests for a vendor to design the perimeter path at Pirone have gone out, and two engineering companies, LandTech and GPR, have put in offers to do so. We hope that both projects will move forward to the next steps in the early fall, and construction to begin in early spring. Other projects currently being completed include relining of the parking lot spaces at Pirone and Sandy Pond, and rehabbing the ball fields at Pirone and High School.

Geese have been a problem this year at Pirone, though surprisingly not much of an issue at Sandy Pond Beach so far. The families that nested at Grove Pond seem to find the grass at Pirone irresistible, and have been difficult to keep off the playing fields as the fledglings continue to grow. The concern is that they leave large amounts of toxic feces behind, which is next to impossible to remove and makes the fields unusable. The use of artificial coyotes had been helpful early on, but the geese eventually became desensitized to their presence. We have been scheduling staff and volunteers to cover most hours of the day to assist in keeping the geese off the fields, and will continue to do so as much as possible leading up to the fall season.

Later this month we will be honoring Ross Cote, Mark Calebrese, Micheal Nodarse and Tyler Mayo for completing their fifth season of work with the Ayer Parks Department. We are very fortunate to have staff members such as these who want to return each season to continue their fine work. Having most of our seasonal employees return each year gives us a more reliable and experienced staff, requires less training and allows more productivity.

Registrations for fall sports are underway, and we will be starting those seasons after Labor Day. We will be closing down the beach at that time for swimming as well, though will continue to keep the park at Sandy Pond open for public use. Planning is under way for the basketball program, which will have preseason activities for the competitive levels starting in October.

Jeff Thomas  
Ayer Parks Director