

# Borough builders

## Venango park to see \$800K revitalization effort

**By Keith Gushard**

MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

VENANGO — Karl Gerdon Park is gearing up for a major makeover — its first in decades.

The borough of Venango has been awarded a \$381,500 state grant that will help fund a more than \$800,000 revitalization of the 2.3-acre community park.

The award, through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, is part of \$90 million in grants announced last week by Gov. Tom Wolf for more than 330 projects across the state. The projects are to create new recreational opportunities, conserve natural resources, and help revitalize local communities.

“Wow, that is amazing,” Jessica Graf said when told of Venango’s award.

Graf, who is vice president of Venango Borough Council, has



SHANNON ROAE/Meadville Tribune/

**Venango Volunteer Fire Department Chief Robert Proper (left), assistant chief Jon Atkin and Venango Borough Council Vice President Jessica Graf pose at the basketball court in Karl Gerdon Park.**

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# Venango

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been spearheading the park revitalization project involving the borough and Venango Volunteer Fire Department, which owns the park.

Karl Gerdon Park is located on South Street on land next to the fire station. Gerdon was one of the founding members of the fire department, and he also owned and operated Gerdon's Red and White Grocery in Venango for many years.

Construction is expected to be done during 2023 and 2024 and will result in more than \$700,000 in improvements, according to Graf.

When completed, the park will have a full-sized multi-purpose basketball court to replace the current undersized one. The current

court has homemade basketball hoops on telephone pole-based supports, Graff said.

New playground equipment with safety surfacing will replace current equipment, much of which dates from the mid-1970s. The park last was improved for the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976 under Gerdon's direction, Graf said. Metal supports and poles from some former playground equipment remain in several spots and will be removed as part of the revitalization.

Additional improvements call for a multi-purpose recreational field, a new handicapped-accessible pavilion, handicapped-accessible restroom facilities, a boat launch at neighboring French Creek, plus parking around the perimeter of the park.

A pathway within the park will link the various sites.

Work on the project began

last year, according to Graf.

The borough, fire department and neighboring Venango United Methodist Church formed a park advisory and planning committee, surveying residents.

"We identified a need and talked to community members," Graf said. "We've got 66 kids in the borough and several hundred more when you take in the surrounding townships."

The community project attracted the attention of Crawford County when Venango applied to the county for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. The county awarded Venango \$141,940 from the county's CDBG allocation in 2021. There's another \$86,000 from the county's 2022 CDBG allocation proposed to be used toward it, though it awaits formal approval by county com-

missioners.

"The catalyst was getting the CDBG money from the county in 2021," Graf said of being able to leverage other money.

Venango Borough and neighboring Venango, Cambridge and Cussewago townships have committed a total of \$39,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Altogether, there's \$815,055.64 expected toward the project, Graf said. There is \$637,411.64 in grants and cash that have been secured so far; the proposed \$86,000 from the county's 2022 CDBG money; and \$91,644 in-kind labor, equipment and material committed, Graf said.

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