

Whitewater in the Heart of Town

Paddle Power to the People By Ryan Newhouse

A quarter-mile section of the Boise River is getting a family- and fun-friendly makeover in the form of the Ray Neef, MD/Boise River Recreation Park.

What's unique about the site is that it will allow boaters to ride manmade waves right in the center of the city. Perhaps just as interesting is the way in which the project's designers plan to fuse high technology with greater environmental awareness.

Citizens and representatives from state agencies searched for more than a decade for the perfect spot for a whitewater park and nature area. Once the location was chosen, it would be developed for recreational access with an eye to improving the waterway for the plants and animals living in and around the river.

For the project, developers settled on a portion of the waterway that had been channelized, or straightened, in the early

20th century. Kayakers had been taking advantage of the "rapids" in that stretch for some time, as water was displaced by chunks of concrete and steel rebar, remnants of a defunct concrete plant upstream. The industrial development had made the riverbank inhospitable to native plants and trees that used to thrive there.

The first phase of the \$3.6 million project included rebuilding the Thurman Mill Diversion Dam with two state-of-the-art wave shapers from Denver-based McLaughlin Whitewater Design. Wave shapers are pneumatic air bladders that raise and lower metal "flashboards" to direct flow from the dam and ensure waves whether the water level is high or low.

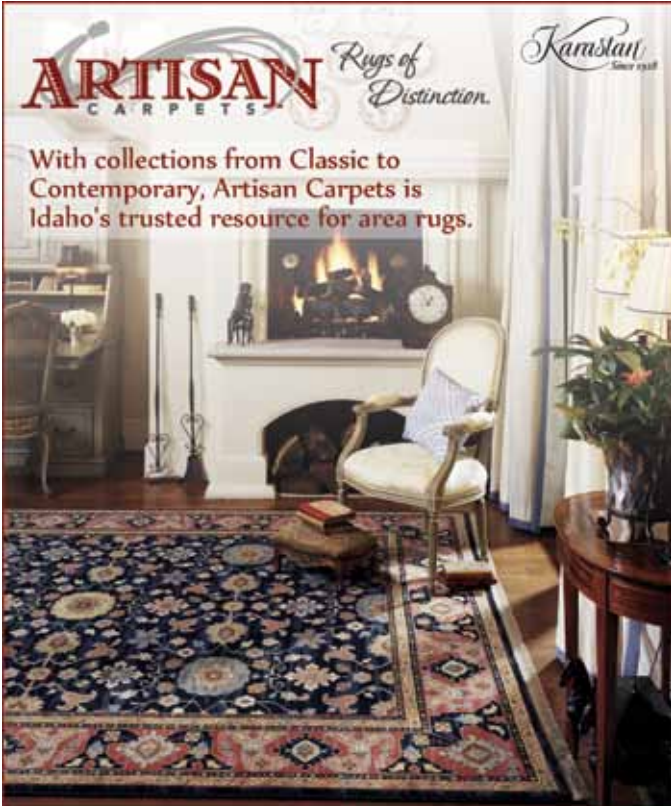
"[The park] will be a destination that can be used most of the year for most of the river flow levels," says Amy Stahl, marketing and community relations coordinator for

Boise Parks and Recreation. "It can also be used by people of many ability levels."

The construction of the recreation area is taking place simultaneously with that of Esther Simplot Park, which will occupy in an undeveloped 55-acre expanse consisting of ponds and riparian (riverbank wildlife) spaces. Groundbreaking on the park project, the plans for which have already been approved by the city, will begin in fall 2012.

Construction of new jetties on both sides of the river will allow boaters to enter and exit in slower waters. Overlooks and parallel pathways along the water's edge will follow a portion of the city's 22-mile Greenbelt. Additionally, restoration along the riverbank will allow spillways for flood mitigation and create areas for planting.

Community volunteers from an organization called Friends of Parks worked



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Whitewater fans will soon be able to shoot the rapids close to home.

with Boise Parks and Recreation staff to raise funds for the development, mainly through donations from private contributors. The Idaho-based J.A. and Kathryn Albertson

Foundation made a considerable grant to move the project forward.

The new development will be named in honor of a local doctor, Ray Neef. The

orthopedist and sports medicine specialist loved the State of Idaho and was a lifelong devotee and practitioner of water sports. ❖



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