

.....Encouraging and enabling Oklahoma citizens to improve their own communities



COMMUNITY INITIATIVE AWARD WINNER 2004 PAWNEE OKLAHOMA

HISTORY

The Pawnee Bath House, a WPA (Work Projects Administration) project built of hand-cut native stone with terraced stairway and landscaping, including a three acre lake for swimming, was originally intended to not only bring needed jobs for the area, but to also provide recreation for Pawnee and the surrounding communities. The project was an immediate success with the Grand Opening featuring a water carnival and dignitary visitation to include the Governor of Oklahoma along with the US WPA project coordinator. The bath house and swimming hole was a popular spot for nearly 40 years.

In 1978, the bath house was closed in preference of a cement pool. Vacant for 25 years, Mother Nature and vandals were beginning to threaten its existence.



FUNDRAISING

In the fall of 2001, the Design Works team from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce visited the City of Pawnee. They were intrigued by the beautiful stone structure and its creative architecture. Inspired by the team's comments, the Mayor and City Clerk began to investigate costs of re-opening the bath house, and a public hearing was held. Interest was generated throughout the community, and a team was organized to begin fund-raising.

In 2002, fund-raising was in full swing with the Pawnee High School Alumni leading the pack. Over \$65,000 came from private donations, with an additional \$20,000 grant from the state. In 2003, the old pool was drained, dirt moved and removed, the beach re-sanded, new roof, new electrical, new bathroom fixtures and plumbing, rockwork repaired, landscaping, and lots of hard work and sweat. There was more volunteer hours than we could count. A generation of citizens who remembered the bath house in its glory not only gave their money, but donated their time and energy, as well.

This was a project in which the entire community became involved. Support was garnered from the City of Pawnee, Pawnee High School Alumni, and the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. The local Masons, Lion's Club, and Rotary all participated in the fund-raising events. On May 2, 2003, the Grand Re-opening was held. Featuring a three acre lake, shaded picnic areas, a sandy beach, water slide, high jump, diving board, and a fully restored 1939 WPA architectural masterpiece.

PROFITABILITY

First, let's talk economics. The filtered and chemically treated water in the cement pool was tapping into the city budget for about \$30,000 per year. In 2002, admissions totaled less than \$2500 for swimmers. In comparison, the Pawnee bath house lake revenue exceeded \$20,0000 with no chemical or water costs. The lake is naturally filtering with a constant water flow in and out. Water is tested weekly with bacteria levels so low it hardly registers. The facility upkeep is minimal. More lifeguards are on staff, but we feel that keeps the money circulating and not just going down the drain!

And the economics just gets better. The publicity generated by the re-opening has been astronomical. Front page, Daily Oklahoman. Tulsa World. Channel 6 and Channel 8 (Tulsa), Channel 4 (OKC), OETA, and Discover Oklahoma (who chose the Pawnee Bath house and pool as their favorite summer retreat for 2003). People are coming from everywhere. Sales tax revenues have increased. This project is a huge success because it has instilled community pride it and has made the cash registers ring!

ACCOMODATIONS

Studies indicate that cultural and heritage tourism is a rising industry in Oklahoma. We took an Oklahoma gem that was in disrepair and restored it to appeal to today's generation. While keeping the historic perspective in the forefront, a few modifications were made that brought the project a new and vibrant look. We added a large gazebo near the beach with electricity and a stage to house live performances for musical groups or wedding ceremonies. The pool now has a waterslide and water trampoline. Bathrooms were updated. Showers and bathroom stalls are now private. We added lots of landscaped areas using plants and shrubs that add color and vitality to the area. We enlarged the beach area and added paddle boats that are used in the area not roped off for swimming. We found that making an old relic profitable takes more than just a hammer and nails. It takes lots of planning, and an understanding of what the public wants. When using public funds, it is necessary to look at all views of the project in order to make it a success.

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