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New Hike and Bike Trails
Garner Park Award
For Timber Lane Utility District

March 17, 2009—A recent ceremony to honor new park projects in the 13-county Houston-Galveston region featured a big-city Goliath and a small-district David.

The city of Houston, population 2.2 million, won or shared four top awards.

The other trophy winner was Timber Lane Utility District, a small municipal utility district that serves about 4700 homes in North Harris County.

The awards were given by the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) in a ceremony last Tuesday at its headquarters near Greenway Plaza.

Timber Lane won top honor or “on-the-ground projects under \$500,000” for its Cypress Creek Hike and Bike Trail, completed in March 2008.

The 5.2-mile trail project “is exemplary in its use of collaboration and volunteers,” said Jeff Taebel, H-GAC’s director of community and environmental planning.

Accepting for Timber Lane were Dan Meacham, president, and fellow directors Bob Schenk, Bud Gessel and Don Berglund. Director Jim Messer could not attend.

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The H-GAC award was the second for Timber Lane Utility District. In 2008, the district won a trophy for best management practices for a master plan that included the trails.

The project consists of two trails along Cypress Creek about two miles north of FM 1960 off Aldine Westfield Road.

A 3.7-mile segment lies south of the Timber Lane subdivision, and a separate 1.5-mile segment is west of the Sandpiper subdivision.

“Most of the labor was provided by volunteers with shovels and pickaxes,” said Gessel, who coordinated the \$80,000 project. It was financed out of the operating budget, not with borrowed money, he said.

More than 200 neighborhood residents, Boy Scouts, off-road bikers, hikers, naturalists, high school students and other volunteers helped build the trails under the direction of Austin-based S&S Trail Services.

“This project shows how, with community involvement, very little money can accomplish big projects,” Gessel said. “The key to our success was planning, planning, and more planning,” he said, crediting a graduate landscape architect program at A&M for help in designing the trails and organizing the project.

The trails wind through stands of native pines and hardwoods, with cypress trees standing in the wetlands along Cypress Creek. Natural vines, wild flowers, and other native vegetation appear in abundance.

“The trails are good for viewing wildlife, especially in the early morning,” Timber Lane resident Steven Johnson said recently. As many as 15 deer graze in nearby

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clearings, he said.

Besides the usual squirrels and rabbits, other hikers have spotted javelinas and a coyote. Woodpeckers and other birds are also plentiful. Great blue herons, egrets and other aquatic species often visit the wetlands.

Hiking trails are surfaced with crushed granite. Combination mountain-bike and hiking trails are natural dirt.

The trails are part the Cypress Creek Greenway Project, a master plan to build a continuous greenbelt with hike-and-bike trails along Cypress Creek from west of U.S. 290 to near U.S. 59.

Next for Timber Lane Utility District is a project to build concrete multi-use paths and a bridge across Cypress Creek to link the Timber Lane Recreation Area with the western grounds of the Mercer Arboretum. Federal funding of \$3.25 million is expected in 2010, Gessel said.

Meanwhile, another volunteer work day will be scheduled for late April, he said, to extend some existing trails and link them with other nearby neighborhoods.

Timber Lane Utility District provides water, sanitary sewers, and drainage for about 4700 homes and apartment units in several nearby subdivisions—Timber Lane, Cypress Trails, Park Spring, Sandpiper, Werrington, and others.

Winners of the H-GAC's park awards were selected by a five-member jury that included a former city council member, an architect, a landscape architect, a landscape designer, and a regional state parks director.

H-GAC is a voluntary association of local governments in the Gulf Coast area.

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