

# Pondview Park project wins awards

**Observation deck allows students to see what is going on under the water.**

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KETTERING — Feet dangling over the edge, fishing pole in hand, a father and son soak up the sunshine and wait patiently for a bite. A couple walks hand-in-hand through the scenic nature trails on a cool summer evening. Curious grade school children lie on their stomachs on the observation deck excitedly collecting samples on a crisp fall morning.

The scene changes daily but the setting remains the same — Kettering's Pondview Park.

Pondview Park is more than shady trees, a peaceful pond and wildflower-lined paths. It has become a living learning lab for more than 3,000 Kettering-area students each year. Kettering teachers have created a curriculum for students in grades K-5 that enables them to experience science firsthand.

"The whole initiative started to get kids outside and use the outdoors as a classroom," said Land Lab program coordinator Kerri Miles, who works jointly for the city of Kettering and the Kettering School District.

"But it's not just the school kids who are using the park," Miles said. "It's beautiful and peaceful and, now, even more enjoyable with the observation deck."

The Dor-Wood Optimist Club is largely responsible for the multiuse L-shaped deck. The club's contribution, combined with individual donations and a grant from the Kettering Community Founda-



**Kettering's Pondview Park is a living learning lab for more than 3,000 Kettering-area students each year.** Contributed photo

tion, made a wish into reality, dedicating it in April 2007.

"We used the park even before the deck but kids were always falling in when they got near the water," Miles said. "This makes so many more things possible."

Volunteers worked countless hours preparing the pond's perimeter for decking and building the sturdy structure. The smiles on the faces of the eager students were payment enough for the members but the Dor-Wood Optimists got a bonus.

The Pondview Park project recently was named the Ohio Service Project of the Year at the state convention and, more recently, received the Future of Optimism Award at the international convention.

"The Future of Optimism Award is a prestigious honor that isn't given every year," said Marc Jewell, Dor-Wood Optimist and Pondview Project chairman. "It is awarded for great service to the community in ways that are unique."

The observation deck was

the capstone project for Dor-Wood Optimists, who were dubbed the "honeysuckle rippers" after spending years cleaning up the park.

"We cleared paths and hauled a lot of mulch over the years and then asked the question, 'What else can we do?'" Jewell said. The answer was the observation deck.

"The kids were learning about what was on top of and underneath the water in the pond and there wasn't really a safe way to do that," he said.

"But it wasn't as easy as going out, buying some lumber and building a deck."

Lumber was only a small portion of the total cost of \$17,000. There was engineering, drilling and other material costs.

"Like any project, it took more time and more money than we thought but it was well worth it," Jewell said.

Optimist International agreed. "It was a unique project because it involved the city, school district, community and the service club all working together," Jewell said.

"The award is great but, to us, it's more important to tell the story because then other people might realize what they can do."