2011 ASLA Design Awards

Centennial Park
Merit Award
Design Concepts CLA, Inc.

Design over $500,000 Construction Budget
Project Name: Centennial Park

Category: 1A: Design (over $500,000 construction budget)

Location: 300 West 5th Street, Rifle, Colorado

Const. Budget: Phase I - $3 Million

Project Summary:

The creation of Centennial Park shows incredible foresight on the part of the community to preserve an important piece of open landscape within a growing city. Centennial Park is the culmination of years of bold dreaming, careful planning and very generous donations and was constructed to commemorate the history of Rifle through the town’s progressive development over the last hundred years and will be here for centuries to come.

Purpose:

The City of Rifle capitalized on a unique opportunity to commemorate its centennial year and create a wonderful open space within the heart of the community. The Centennial Park site is a 6-block long linear park in Rifle’s central business district. It was developed on approximately 14 acres of land following Rifle Creek that is owned by the City of Rifle (5.5 acres) and on easements from RE-2 School District (9 acres), and the Rifle Downtown Development Authority (0.5 acres). The park connects to the historic downtown on one end and to the county’s fairgrounds on the other. Along the way, it is framed by residential neighborhoods and a middle school.

The overall goal of Centennial Park is to serve the entire region by providing and offering passive recreation amenities and opportunities, historical and environmental education, and a residential/community connection to the Rifle downtown area for individuals of all ages and physical capabilities. The park also provides needed bike and pedestrian trail connections to the middle school, existing city and proposed county trails, and city/state parks. Once considered nothing more than an overgrown flood plain for Rifle Creek, it is now one of the shining examples of Rifle’s dedication and perseverance to improve and further develop the City Parks and Trail system. It is a tribute to the history and people of this dynamic community.

The park has proven to attract residents and visitors, increase their sense of place and pride in their community and encourage residents to interact with the space and each other.

Role Of Landscape Architect Vs. Role Of Other Participants:

The Landscape Architect conducted public meetings to involve the citizens in master planning their park. The vision and goals for the park were developed with the community including involvement from the Historical Society, school district and the Downtown Development Authority and presented in graphic and narrative formats, including a “poster” of the design showing historic images and vignettes of the proposed features within the park. The master plan booklet was also prepared to provide a guideline for implementation of the park, including a useful representation of how the park could be phased over time. The Landscape Architect prepared construction documents and managed a team of subconsultants, including civil, structural and electrical engineers.

Special Factors:

Centennial Park’s concept is unique to Rifle in that it represents a timeline as the organizing framework for the site. The idea of extending the park beyond the boundaries was part of a plan to use Centennial Park as a seam that would knit the east and west parts of Rifle together into a common community. These neighborhoods have traditionally been separated economically, socially, as well as physically. The park also becomes the seed for creating a sense of identity throughout all of Rifle as it grows into the future.

Moving north through the park from the southern edge, the first hundred years of Rifle’s history is reflected a decade at a time. Celebrating the “centennial” theme, the Park chronicles the development of Rifle starting at the 3rd Street “1885 Gateway” which marks the founding of Rifle, travels (north) through various informational waysides and gateways celebrating each decade of 20th century in Rifle, and ends at the 9th Street Gateway marking the 2005 Centennial. This is paralleled with corresponding world events, facts and famous quotes within the same time periods, to place Rifle within a larger cultural context. The informational waysides including interpretive signage serve all ages, educate residents and visitors on Rifle’s history and draw people interested in heritage tourism. The timeline extends along a multi-use trail that follows the creek beyond the park, making it possible to continue the “timeline”
concept into the future beyond the boundaries of the park. Members of the Rifle Historical Society volunteered their time to assemble over a century of facts and information for use in the park.

Additional entrances to the park include West 3rd Street (Rifle’s Main Street), the Middle School, two Park Avenue Neighborhood entrances, the Garfield County Fairgrounds and the 9th and Railroad Avenue entrance (the primary North/South Street in Rifle). Additionally, the entire park is bisected by the Rifle Trail System that allows off-street pedestrian and bicycle travel through much of the community and is lined with various types of seating to encourage folks to stop and spend time in the park.

Significance:

Special consideration was given to existing environmental conditions including the floodplain and sporadic seasonal floods that impact the park on an annual basis. Collapsible bridge rails, strategically placed seat walls and an elevated pump house were results of several flood analysis studies conducted throughout the design process. An environmental assessment of the site was conducted and the results influenced the protection of Rifle Creek and its surrounding wetlands, native areas and animal habitat.

To sustain and simplify long term maintenance operations, an efficient irrigation system, minimal sod, perimeter native seed and hardy durable plant material that can handle dry and occasional wet conditions enhance the natural environment of Centennial Park. Vehicular access, walk widths, occasional flood clean up and vandalism were all taken into consideration when designing and detailing park features. Solar lights edge the main pedestrian walk and amphitheater, plaza and LED parking lot lights all aid in keeping the park safe and secure.

The community enthusiastically responded to the parks completion and is now a huge attraction in Rifle’s downtown. In addition to the waysides, unique features of the park include: a water splash park (known as the “SprayGround”) that draws children and families from all walks of life. The SprayGround is surrounded by a shade-providing pergola and trees, a sundial, bench and knee-wall seating, and large amphitheater that is used for everything from dance performances and recitals to sunrise church services. Another unique feature is the Great Bowl, a very large lawn area that serves as a passive play area and an outdoor community event space. The 5th Street Gateway entrance is one of the primary connections to downtown from the Park and features the “1905 Wayside Pedestrian Bridge” over Rifle Creek, a large bronze statue entitled “Over the Rainbow”, a parking lot, restrooms and group picnic shelters.

In addition, the Park also functions to attract visitors not only to elements within the park but also to the thriving downtown scene. This has been beneficial to the economic development of local businesses such as restaurants, gift shops, and the active nightlife. For example, the City of Rifle has developed the “Summer Concert Series”, which while providing entertainment to the community has proven to stimulate the local economy. This is due largely in part of the park’s proximity to the nearby downtown area. The concert series has been well received. Approximately 100 residents attended the first concert. The following concert had over 300 attendees, mostly through word of mouth advertising. Although the park is well used now, the City plans more development and expansion, focused primarily on the “more recent years” portion of the Park, 1955 to 2005.

Currently under design is a new playground that will be placed directly north of Great Bowl and will highlight Rifle’s rich energy-development history. The Centennial Park Master Plan also calls for the addition of an outdoor learning center, a boardwalk through the wetlands and riparian areas, a fitness course, further development of a retention pond as a park/wildlife amenity, a plaza around the 2005 time capsule sealed in an oil-shale boulder (currently near the 2005 wayside bridge) as well as additional seating, picnic areas and restroom facilities. These items will be developed as staff time and finances allow.

Prior to the Centennial’s development, Rifle did not have an abundance of welcoming public spaces that encouraged social interaction outside of work or home. The features of the Park were designed to attract residents and visitors, increase their sense of place and pride in their community and encourage residents to interact with the space and with each other. The park brings the community together and is a place for residents to congregate and socialize. It is a destination for travelers to leave the interstate and experience the park and the City of Rifle. Centennial Park is an amazing addition to the City.

The project not only reinforces the role of landscape architects in creating large community spaces, it also reinforces the value of these places in enhancing the sense of place and economic vitality of communities. This is becoming increasingly important as communities struggle to provide services to their residents with diminishing resources. The role of landscape architects in creating places that add real value to the community is exemplified by this project.

The relevance of this project to landscape architecture, the public and the environment is addressed through the application of the skills of landscape architects as lead consultants on a project that involves facilities that are often mainstream LA projects, but which in this case meets a broader set of goals beyond providing a recreational amenity.