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Additions to Ryerson Station State Park making a splash

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You round a bend along the winding road and catch your breath as a field of black-eyed Susans appears before you. Just beyond the sea of orange wildflowers, water sprays from twisty tubes and giant daisies, and a zero entry pool invite visitors to Ryerson Station State Park to cool off.

"Everybody talks about the view of Pittsburgh as you come through the Fort Pitt Tunnel. That's kind of what this is," said Pam Metzger, membership coordinator for the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation. "It was like, wow."

The new swimming complex, nestled amidst lush forest in western Greene County's state park, opened to visitors Memorial Day weekend. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Friday morning for the state's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Ryerson park staff, local dignitaries and the Greene County Chamber of Commerce.

"It's a magnificent facility," John Hallas, director of state parks for Pennsylvania's DCNR, said Friday, gesturing to the brand-new attraction. "It's an impressive site as you drive in. It takes our pools, swimming recreation and amenities to the very next level in state parks. We're so happy that it is here in Ryerson Station Park."

Ground broke on the new swimming complex, which boasts a splash pad and tipping bucket and a zero entry pool with a twisty slide, at the end of the 2019 pool season.

The original Ryerson swimming pool closed for the last time that year and, on Aug. 29, 2019, construction of the new complex got underway.

"Our goal was to create something remarkable," said DCNR secretary Cindy Adams Dunn. "We all know the history of Ryerson Station: The loss of the dam, the loss of the lake, the loss of the park that was. We doubled down ... and committed to a long-term process to make this a spectacular park in our system."

The pool and spray park are open at no charge to visitors during the summer. Folks are welcome to bring snacks or lunch for enjoying on picnic benches just outside the water areas, and lockers are available for storing personal items.

The parking lot (which sits where the former pool once gleamed in afternoon sunlight) is covered in a solar canopy, which keeps cars cool while folks splash the day away. The solar canopy is the first of its kind to be installed in a state park.

"This park is now net zero in terms of energy consumption," said Adams Dunn. "The energy for this park is generated by solar."

The spray park inside the swimming complex is also exceptionally green. Water that sprays from tubes and shapes is reused, to reduce waste. Kids are already having a ball standing beneath the tipping water bucket, and adults will enjoy cooling off in the pool's deep end while their young ones fly down the big, green slide.

"My mom used to bring us to the old pool when I was a kid," said Julie Schumacher, of Washington County, who trekked to Ryerson for the second time this summer with her son Ja'mir, 6, Friday.

"He's really enjoyed it. It is important to give the kids something to do, especially when we live in a rural area and there's not always a lot of options," Schumacher said. "We've enjoyed being able to come down. Especially since it's free – that's a plus."

In April 2013, the DCNR and Consol Energy Inc., settled a lawsuit concerning mining impact on Duke Lake. The dam was emptied in July 2005 when inspections revealed foundation movement and seepage.

The new pool complex cost an estimated \$10 million, according to the DCNR, and was paid for with those settlement funds.

Bigger plans are in the works at Ryerson Station State Park, including a redesigned entrance, said park manager Alan Johnson.

Stream restoration, a fishing pond and new hiking and biking trails are also in the works.

"We committed to the community, to Greene County and to the commonwealth that we would make Ryerson Station an extraordinary park in the commonwealth once again," said Hallas.

Melody Longstreth, director of the Greene County Chamber of Commerce, said her daughter's first swimming experience was at the original Ryerson pool.

"She's 30 now," Longstreth smiled, adding she hopes her grandchildren's first swim experience can be at the new pool complex.

"Ryerson has a place in everyone's heart in Greene County," she said. "Almost all of us have some type of memory that we can share from this park. The new technology and the new beginnings that we are seeing here are just outstanding. This is something that is vital to our community. We're in a beautiful, beautiful place."

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