

Claridon Woodlands Activity Corridor



- Hiking trails leading to various recreational opportunities (1.1 mi)
- **Cost:** \$240,000
- **Funding Sources:** Park District Land Improvement Fund
- **Dates:** Master Planning 2016 – Construction 2017
- **Project Leaders:** Matthew McCue, Director of Planning; Daniel McConnaughy, Park Planner; Tommy Yokum, Park Planner

County: Geauga
Geauga Park District



A new park that joins the top six most popular of 22 parks as soon as it opens. A new amenity that, in a single season, inspires more than 2,000 trips into the treetops. Geauga Park District's Claridon Woodlands proved an instant hit because the park was developed to meet the community at its needs, pairing well maintained, beautiful, traditional park amenities with several extraordinary new offerings. Through these, it also draws a new audience of young and adventure-seeking residents, reinforcing to all the importance of Nature protected by a county park district.

At 127 acres, Claridon Woodlands is home to Cuyahoga River tributaries and a variety of ecosystems for hands-on school programming. It opened in January 2018 with access to 2.2 miles of trails through a former sugarbush and two stocked man-made ponds with areas for fishing and observation. In-house construction crews had installed most of the trails, bridges, boardwalks, bike elements and scenic overlooks themselves. A connection to Geauga Park District's 21.1-mile paved Maple Highlands Trail also offered trail users new picturesque views and access to restrooms and drinking fountains.

Then, beginning in April, new amenities opened, and these helped attract approximately 20,145 visits May 25 to September 30, according to car counters. These special features, including a high ropes course, zipline and boulder to climb, were as exciting as they were creative and innovative to the community – opportunities lacking but clearly much desired.

Project Leaders/Managers: List the individuals who helped champion the planning, funding, and implementation of the project.


REQUIRED: Provide contact information in case we need to contact you about this project.

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The Good Stuff

- Features high ropes course, zipline, pump track/single mountain bike track, freeform boulder wall, Nature-based playground, connection to The Maple Highlands Trail, bridges, fishing, restrooms, vehicular parking, lodge, tables, overlooks, firepit

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Seeking new ways to explore the Great Outdoors or inspiration to try something different, park patrons gravitated to the ropes course, which features platforms 32 feet off the ground linked by eight 23-to-32-foot-long challenge elements (Wobbly Logs, Tarzan Stump Traverse, Icicle Traverse, Beam, Railroad, Ride the Wave, Multivine and Wobbly XOXO) and concludes with a 100-foot-long zipline exit. Patrons can get creative with their hour in the sky, too, choosing which elements they use in which order.

Between May 25 and September 30, onsite staff ran the course five days a week, Geauga residents going up free of charge. This yielded 2,216 trips into the treetops, nearly 552 per month.

Claridon Woodlands also delivered other recreational amenities not previously seen in Geauga County: a 12-foot-high, 900-square-foot freeform boulder wall; a pump track and 2,025-foot-long linear single mountain bike track featuring 2-foot-wide boardwalk crossings; and a Nature-based playground with log balance beams, a canoe sandbox, log tunnel, play cabin, boulders and other various climbing elements. Over the years, mountain bike trails had been periodically requested; Claridon Woodlands made Geauga Park District's first one a reality.

The new Judge Lester Taylor Lodge drew 109 public reservations in that same time frame for family gatherings, parties and more – a resounding approval. This facility uniquely features a kitchenette, outdoor bistro sets and indoor restrooms with running water. And much like other Geauga Park District lodges, it also offers gorgeous views of natural features and custom-made wooden furniture. Capacity: 99 happy guests.

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Unique!

- 19,199 visitors tallied via car counter in 2020
- 531 high ropes climbers in 2020 (record 68 percent capacity), including 90 percent reservations filled (259 adults, 272 youth)
- **Environmental enhancement:** Rain gardens incorporated into the pump track to manage storm water

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Despite all these new offerings, everything from the ropes course to the trail system was installed in a way responsible to Geauga Park District's mission to conserve and protect. Of the 3.5 acres utilized for the entry drive, parking areas and facilities, nearly all was previously impacted, and these items account for less than 3 percent of the park. Amenities are nestled within the trees. Onsite and in-facility LED lighting minimizes electricity use. Native meadow plantings minimize turf areas to mow and therefore use of fossil fuel. Bioswales with native grasses and wildflowers capture stormwater runoff from the drive and parking areas, and receive rainwater from the lodge roof via a runnel feature near its entrance. These site features are also presented in a way to educate visitors about the importance of water quality.

Claridon Woodlands is a major demonstration of excellence in parks and recreation that Geauga Park District has come to represent in Northeast Ohio, but with a twist – fresh, engaging, easily accessible amenities. Residents are welcome to visit daily (and many do) and to “learn the ropes” seasonally. Geauga Park District staff look forward to promoting and programming Claridon Woodlands further in the years to come.

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Buzz on the Street

- “I’ve been up there, it is fun!!!” –Nicole Matty Linden on Facebook 4/8/21, of the climbing boulder
- “We did this last year...poor old me could barely cross one obstacle to the zip line...but felt thrilled when I finally got to the ground!” –Susan Sterpka Ballish on Facebook in 2020, of the high ropes course

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- “We have to do a bicycle ride again there.” –Larry Char Judd on Facebook in 2020
- “It is so fun and in our back yard – a must do!!” – Carolyn Cardamone-Osters on Facebook in 2020

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Claridon Woodlands’ activity corridor is a great asset to this rural area. Planning involved multiple consultants, from the overall park and lodge design to the climbing boulder and high ropes course, which were design-build. Project consultants included Entre-Prises Climbing Walls (climbing boulder) and Aerial Designs (ropes).

Noteable project champions were Geauga Park District Executive Director John Oros and the Board of Park Commissioners, which championed a new park that would capture the interest of visitors from childhood to young adulthood in addition to the more common adult demographic.

Future plans for this most popular corridor include the possible addition of a low ropes course to accommodate a less adventurous audience with fewer restrictions, as well as more promotion to area organizations and businesses who could use the high ropes course for teambuilding.