

# Enjoy a walk through nature

**By Traci Chapman**  
Contributing Writer

**M**artin Nature Park has long been an oasis of greenery amid the urban sprawl that is Oklahoma City.

This summer, visitors will enjoy an improved park and facilities, thanks to partnerships and city funding dedicated to make the popular site even better, officials said.

Martin's improvements began with a recent partnership formed to celebrate the Great American Cleanup, held in March during Oklahoma Arbor Week.

"It's exciting when you see a team like this – people from city, state, private industry and nonprofit groups, who work together to accomplish something so significant," Oklahoma Forestry Services Director George Geissler said. "Together we were able to make a much bigger impact in a shorter period of time than we ever could have working alone."

Oklahoma City, which oversees the park, worked with forestry officials, as well as representatives of Oklahoma City

Community Foundation, OKC Beautiful, Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, Warren CAT and P&K Equipment – and another 30 volunteers – who gathered March 24 and 25 to make improvements to the park, cutting down dead trees and trimming branches.

"That's a way we mitigate potential risks to public health and safety – and those were determined after our foresters assessed miles of public trails," Geissler said. "Volunteers helped plant 400 tree seedlings our department provided, and the Oklahoma City Community Foundation pitched in protective tree shelters for those seedlings and another 13 large specimen trees.

"We planted those in highly utilized and key areas of Martin Park," he said.

Oklahoma Environmental Management Authority and Minick Materials donated mulch to help minimize soil erosion, while Warren CAT and P&K Equipment employees worked with volunteers to spread those materials throughout the park, Geissler said.



—Photo by Traci Chapman

**Martin Nature Park features 2.5 miles of trails, ponds, picnic pavilion and visitor's center.**

"The project really embraced the spirit of both Arbor Week and Great American Cleanup Week," he said.

While Arbor Day work centered on Martin Park's environmental aspects, two Oklahoma City two general obligation bonds totaling about \$650,000 helped fund renovations to the site's visitor center and restrooms, and providing parking lot expansion and improved lighting. The center includes an event room and naturalist office, several displays and a library, Geissler said.

The project added more than 30

parking spaces and doubled previously existing lighting at the park, Oklahoma City officials said.

Martin Park is situated over 140 acres and has more than 2.5 miles of trails and ponds, the visitor's center, nature-themed playground and picnic pavilion. Visitors can explore the park on their own or take part in guided hikes and educational activities. Camps, weekly programs and special events round out opportunities for visitors to get the most out of their visit to the park, Geissler said.

Martin Park is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Aquarium: Hosts several special events

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Special events are held throughout the year – from "Sleep with the Sharks" to the Aquarium Run, a Valentine's Day dinner, Symphony by the Sea and more – all help to encourage education and interest in water, whether it's the ocean, lakes, rivers or streams.

"We want to pass on our love and passion for these waterways and for the animals that live in and on them," Lovell said. "As a non-profit, we work

very hard to further our mission – 'To educate and inspire conservation of our aquatic world through interactive discovery.'

"We take that very seriously," she said.

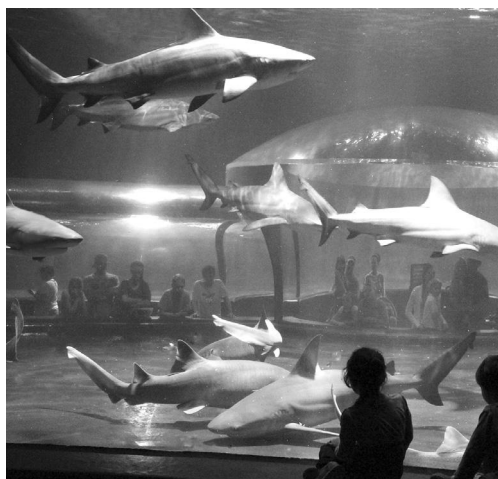
Also on the aquarium grounds is Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation regional headquarters. ODWC offers information about outdoor recreation, sport fishing and conservation.

Oklahoma Aquarium is located at 300 Aquarium Drive in Jenks and is open every day

but Christmas Day. The facility is open from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. except for Tuesday, when it is open until 9 p.m. The last admission ticket is sold one hour before closing.

Ticket prices are \$15.95 for adults; \$13.95 for seniors and military members; and \$11.95 for children ages 3 through 12. Children under 2 are free.

For more information, go online to <http://www.okaquarium.org/> or the aquarium's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/OKAquarium?fref=nf>.



—Provided photo

**Crowds have traveled to the 72,000-square-foot aquarium the last 12 years to see eight exhibits, including the shark tunnel and a 30,000-piece antique fishing tackle collection.**