

Quality of life

Oakland communities go after new state grants

See related editorial.

By Bill Kele
staff writer

Parks and recreation officials across Oakland County are scrambling to meet tomorrow's deadline to request a share of nearly \$16 million in state grants.

Voters approved the money last year for the state Department of Natural Resources' new Quality of Life recreation bond program, DNR spokesman Michael McDonald said Friday.

Under the new program, the state will match individual communities' money on a 3-to-1 basis for approved public recreation programs, McDonald said.

With the Aug. 4 deadline for applications looming, few bids for the cash had been filed by late last week. But McDonald said his office was bracing for a flurry of last-minute requests.

"So far, it's been really zilch, but we're expecting quite a large response," he said. "Everyone's very aware of our programs."

COMPETITION FOR the money is so intense that Troy won't even try for funds because it lacks a master plan for parks and recreation, spokesman Roger Kowalski said last week.

"Everybody and their brother will be going after this first batch of money," Kowalski said.

But in neighboring Rochester Hills, officials are hoping for \$750,000 to bolster the \$250,000 they approved July 26 for an historic theme park on the grounds of the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm.

The money would be used to renovate and develop six buildings on 10 acres the city recently acquired near the museum, city spokesman Jim Schmidt said.

Parks and forestry director Michael Hartner said he was "extremely optimistic" the DNR would ap-

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— Roger Kowalski
Troy Parks and Recreation

prove the request. Word is expected before the end of the year on which projects will receive aid.

In Farmington Hills, director of special services Dan Potter said money would be sought for the city's \$500,000, 15-acre South End Park project and a \$250,000 day camp and nature center at Heritage Park.

"We're currently using an old sheep barn (as a day camp)," Potter said. "It's very, very primitive."

OFFICIALS IN West Bloomfield Township will ask for aid for a \$441,300, 4½-mile network of wooded trails and a \$1.2-million parks and recreation activity center, recreation director Joey Spano said.

"The people of West Bloomfield

have expressed a desire for more recreation projects for a long time, but we've never been able to pull any money together," Spano said.

"We're just hoping for the best."

Southfield will try for \$300,000 to match \$130,000 it wants to spend on Pebble Creek Park, a 16-acre tract at 11 Mile and Inkster Roads, recreation director Bill Walenczak said.

The park would include a ballfield, regulation soccer field, jogging track and a picnic area, he said.

The state will consider the need of each community's project and its long-term commitment to recreation programs in deciding which applications to approve, the DNR's McDonald said.



GUY WARREN/staff photographer

Doug Ross plans on returning to Michigan. But for now, it's off to Washington, D.C.

Rock 'n roll a key to his skills, savvy

"The best training for my job didn't come from school or graduate school. Rock and roll turned out to be the ideal preparation. It teaches you about group dynamics, public speaking and blends in a little showmanship."

— Doug Ross, Michigan's exiting commerce director

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

Doug Ross, the man who once played bass for a group that backed the Supremes and later led his own band, The Classics, through a decade of rock and roll, was having one of his last breakfast meetings as a Southfield resident.

He said he'll miss being commerce director. He thinks he's leaving Michigan with a drastically improved relationship between government and private sector business. He knows Jim Blanchard will run for and win another term as governor. That's a job Ross, 47, clearly has his eyes on in the future.

But for now, he's heading to Washington to become president of the Corporation for Enterprise Development. His successor is supposed to be chosen before Ross leaves Sept. 1.

"I have no individual in mind" regarding someone he'd like to see as the new commerce director, Ross said. "For reasons of continuity and for what I believe to be the truth, I'd like to see someone with a strong belief in private and public partnership."

THAT PARTNERSHIP is something Ross has a stake in and would like to see developed even further. Even his critics, who say he's used his office to cheerlead for Blanchard, readily acknowledge Ross has brought Michigan's business climate around.

"There are two things that may endure and make a difference. One is the relationship between the government and private sector of Michigan. Once that was a real adversarial relationship. Now it's good, and I think that's permanent — unless we get someone in government who doesn't understand it and unravels it."

"Two, we (Michigan) were the first in America to understand you did not have to get out of industrial activity — the business of making things — to be successful. They said you had to be in services. We concluded that wasn't true. Our challenge has been to help it transform itself," Ross said.

'You can't plan life around what ifs.' Since you don't know how long you're going to be around, you have to live each day, if not each year, as though it were your last.'

— Doug Ross

At 47, Ross is philosophical about change. He thinks author Alvin Toffler "still has the best broad overview of what's happened to us, to Michigan." His own personal philosophy is something he's practicing in his move to Washington.

"You can't plan life around 'what ifs.' Since you don't know how long you're going to be around, you have to live each day, if not each year, as though it were your last."

THE JOB IN Washington doesn't seem overwhelming to him. "We're going to have to get Washington to understand what states have been experiencing — figuring out how to compete with the Asians and Europeans."

He'd also like states, particularly Michigan, to rethink their approach to public school education. "The role for business and commerce is the reinvention of the public education system to fit this economy."

"They'll have to do two things. Students will have to be taught to learn to learn," he said, instead of just retrieving and sorting facts. "And schools will have to help students operate as teams that are constantly solving problems. When we went to school, we went through talking to nobody and that's the wrong preparation."

Part of his move to Washington with his wife, Karol, and Julie, at 15 the youngest of their three children, was based on a promise she made to Julie about the years she would spend in high school. "We told her we wouldn't move during those three years, which meant we had to do it now or wait until 1992."

His wife is a psychologist specializing in marriage and family counseling ("a brilliant move for a politician, eh?") If they move again after Washington, Ross said the next move will be her call. "We're really just Michiganians going away for a couple years," he said.

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