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BY PHYLLIS BOOTH PBOOTH@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

A pond takes shape at Norco Club

A pond takes shape at Norco Club



An excavator digs in to make room for more water at the Norco pond. Submitted photo

PRINCETON – It was first proposed two decades ago.

Now, five million gallons of water later, the Norco Sportsman’s Club in Princeton has its own pond, ready to be stocked with trout just in time for the youth fishing derby next month.

“We’ve been trying to do this for the past 20 years,” said Kevin McManus, club member and a civil engineer who was able to take a month off from his work to oversee the construction/installation of the two-acre pond off Houghton Road. “I wanted to make sure it was done right.”

Siting the pond on the property took a great deal of planning since the area is next to a watershed, wetlands and a nearby beaver pond.

The pond was designed with the cooperation of the Norco Pond Committee, Structural Civil Design of Worcester, the Princeton Conservation Commission, the state Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture branch in Holden, the Princeton Light Department, Eco Tec of Worcester, Art Allen, Allied Recycling Earthwork Division of Walpole, Geo-Search Environmental Drilling of Fitchburg, and Guaranteed Pump in Pelham, N.H.

The pond is designed to hold trout that will be purchased from local fish hatcheries.

“We’ll buy some decent sized trout. It will cost about \$2,000 to stock the pond to try to get youth interested in fishing and we also hope to get kids interested in hunting and wildlife preservation,” said McManus.

At its deepest point the pond reaches 20 feet deep, just right for cold waterloving trout, said McManus.

“Mass Wildlife suggested we focus on trout since only 10 percent or less of all water bodies in Massachusetts can support trout,” he said. “We met with Dr. Mark Tisa, head of the state fisheries program to specifically designate this as a trout pond and to keep all other species out if possible.”

To protect the watershed of nearby East Wachusett Brook, the pond is lined with bentonite clay. As soon as it gets wet the material expands to 300 times its size and becomes like a jelly, sticking to and sealing the soil. Right now the water is an aqua color, which comes from the glacial clay deep in the soil, said McManus. That will gradually fade, he notes.

Allied Recycling was hired because the company had an enormous track excavator with an arm reach of 38 feet, said McManus.

“A hydraulic excavator with a sevenplus yard bucket was quickly able to dig out the pond area in just two weeks. The conservation commission and the DCR were thrilled. It didn’t change the topography of the land at all,” he said.

That machine had to be assembled on site with the assistance of a crane and another excavator. Earth was removed from the pond area, loaded into dump trucks, and dumped at the Norco trap range where it was leveled with a bulldozer.

The construction plan allowed the ground water to be moved to one side of a coffer dam, the betonite installed, and then the dam removed to let the water flow over the liner. “We kept repeating that process and by the time we finished the pond was already three-fourths full of groundwater,” said McManus.

“We’ve purchased a 26-foot-high government surplus windmill that we’ll put a pump on top of that, which will pump air into a bubbler in the middle of the pond to keep it aerated, providing oxygen for the fish. The blades move in a two-mph breeze, so here it will be cranking.”

Club members have already seen blue heron and ducks at the pond and it’s also jumping with frogs. “Mass Wildlife said that’s a good sign,” said McManus. The club will install a well that will run intermittently to let the aquifer recharge. The pond also has a gate valve that can be used in the event of a significant rainstorm to lower the level of the water.

Fire hydrants

The club is adding two hydrants for the Princeton Fire Department.

“The pond is accessible along a road so this will give them an unlimited supply of water for this area, which is great for insurance rates for the neighbors,” said McManus. “We also have 350 acres of forest here that we’re concerned about and this gives us a great source of water protection.”

In 1997, the Norco Club entered into an agreement with the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (then known as the Metropolitan District Commission) to put a conservation restriction on 265 acres of the club's 350 total acres.

The remnants of a cellar hole of the home of Joshua Wilder, the first settler in Princeton in 1742, are on the property. The area was cleaned



Front, Kevin McManus installs a lock on the gate valve that will be used to raise and lower the level of the water in the event of a major rainstorm at the new pond. Rear, Mike LaFountain, Dick Fontaine, Jack Lynch and Ryan McManus supervise. Phyllis Booth photo

up as part of an Eagle Scout project and has been marked and identified as a historical site.

McManus said the club wants to educate adults and youth about the outdoors. The club holds classes in hunting, sporting clays, trap shooting, and has a rifle and archery range.

Club president Dick Fontaine recently received an award from the Worcester County Sportsman's League for Sponsor of the Year training kids to archery shoot and pheasant hunt. Fontaine is also an avid trap shooter.

“We need to pass that knowledge on. Rather than books it has to be a hands-on effort,” McManus said. “The club has changed over the past few years and now has a focus on youth, what's going on in the environment and on wildlife.”

The Norco Club was formed in 1937 by a group of sportsmen who worked at the former Norton Company in Worcester. In 1947 they took out a loan that was co-signed by then Norton Company owner John Jeppson and purchased three parcels of land totaling 305 acres and in 1999 bought another 45 acres. The clubhouse was once an engineering shack used in the construction of Norton's Machine Division on Brooks Street in Worcester where the Showcase North movie theater now stands.

The company gave the structure to the club. It was cut in half and moved to the Houghton Road site at a cost of about \$1,500, which was added to the original mortgage. The club was a private organization, consisting of Norton employees only until Saint Gobain purchased the company in 1991. Today about 50 percent of the active members never worked at Norton Company. The present membership stands at 180; 15 are junior members.

The cost to join the club is \$50 with a one-time initiation fee of \$10. There is an eight-hour work requirement involved as a member. Junior members may join with an adult sponsor.

The Norco Club is in a forestry/wildlife management program and the land consists of hardwood and pine forest, open fields, a trout stream (East Wachusett Brook), the new trout pond, and a natural three-acre wetland habitat. They offer deer hunting and stocked pheasant hunting as well as rifle and pistol shooting ranges, trap range, archery target station and archery

shooting course. The clubhouse has a meeting and function room, commercially equipped kitchen, bar and pool table.

The grounds include parking for 100 cars and a 10-by-30 covered barbecue and half-acre of manicured lawn for outdoor activities. The clubhouse is open Thursday nights at 6 p.m. and members have access to the multiple ranges any time.

“We stock over 500 pheasant on the property in the fall during bird hunting season, in conjunction with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife,” said Fontaine. “Over the past three years we’ve stocked the East Wachusett Brook with hundreds of trout and are grooming the fields on the property to support both small and large wildlife. We have evidence of moose and deer on the property, along with snowshoe hare, turkey, pheasant, beaver, fishers, owls and hawks, and many other species of animals and birds.”

Trap shooting

The trap shooting range was improved using the rocks that were dug out from the pond area.

“We saved all the rocks and lined the entire perimeter of the trap range with them,” said McManus. “We also turned the range, and installed another range so we’re shooting away from the wetland and shooting upland.”

The two trap ranges are side by side in a flat area and electricity has been installed. The clay targets used at the range are all biodegradable, he said. Twelve gauge shotguns are usually used for trap shooting; youth use smaller shelled shotguns.

“Trap shooting events gather hundreds of people now,” said McManus. “It’s a big sport and it’s a lot better now with a level playing field.”

The Brittany Spaniel Club has expressed interest in training dogs at Norco, said McManus.

“We’re a very mild-mannered club with a lot of members from all over the region – Holden, Sterling, Princeton, Paxton, Rutland, the Brookfields, Clinton, Lancaster and Hubbardston. Many of us went to other clubs, but it’s like a family here now,” he said.

The club sponsors four major social events during the year: a Game Dinner in March, a steak barbecue in June, a New England Clam Bake in August, and a pig roast in September, which benefits the Pheasant Program. The events are open to the public.

Other events include the annual icefishing derby, fresh water fishing derby and at least one deep sea fishing trip. The past few years the club has given the use of the facility to the Princeton Recreation Committee for its annual Halloween Howler.

The club is also available for small functions; the clubhouse can hold up to 75 people.

For more information contact Fontaine at (978) 464-5243.

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