

Making a connection

The Arc's greenspace has entered cyberspace

By Mike Crowley

MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

When Ryan Kebe scrolled past a social media post in late December that mentioned the need for WiFi service at The Arc Community Greenspace in downtown Meadville, not only did he think it was a good idea, he thought it was something he could help with.

A few months later, a publicly accessible hotspot has been installed by Armstrong, Kebe's employer, to provide free WiFi service in and around the greenspace, located on Market Street just north of Arch Street.

The post from Amara Geffen, the Meadville artist who has led the green space design process, included photos of solar-powered tables being installed. The tables come with umbrellas featuring an array of solar cells that power LEDs to illuminate the tables at night and outlets so visitors can charge their phones.

"In the Facebook post, it also mentioned they were looking for some public WiFi," Kebe recalled on Friday. "We have community hotspots that we deploy throughout all of our systems, and coincidentally we were going to install one in Meadville — I was looking for a space."

Beginning in 2011, Armstrong's hotspots have provided free WiFi access during the Crawford County Fair, and Kebe said community hotspots are available in a number of locations in the region: at Ice House Park, Conneaut Lake; at the Open Air Market and Scheide Park, Titusville; at General McLane High School, Edinboro. Several, including one located at North Shenango Volunteer Fire Department were deployed in response to the pandemic.

"The next one will be here at The Arc Greenspace," Kebe said.

The tables and WiFi are part of a larger plan to encourage the development of healthier relationships through the greenspace, particularly between clients of The Arc and the community in general, according to Executive Director Mark Weindorf.

See GREENSPACE, Page A11



Geoff Frank (left), Stacy Morris (facing away), Heather Millhorn and Allison McQuone begin a game of Yahtzee on Friday at one of the solar-powered tables in The Arc Community Greenspace, located at the intersection of Market Street and Clinton Court. Visitors can now also play Yahtzee online at the greenspace thanks to free WiFi provided by Armstrong.

MIKE CROWLEY/Meadville Tribune

Greenspace

Continued from Page A1 "The whole genesis of this is to get our clients intertwined with other community members and not have the stigma," Weindorf said. "A lot of our people get services during the day and then they disappear into society and they're not connected to people from a gym or from a church."

While the idea of a community space may seem to exist already in the form of Diamond Park, Weindorf said the

Other community groups are welcome to use the space as well, according to Weindorf.

"If you want to think about having an event there," Weindorf said, "call The Arc."

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greenspace offers alternative possibilities, especially for The Arc's clientele.

Recalling some of those clients taking out tables and chairs out to set up for the event and helping to direct traffic, Weindorf said the space is more comfortable for them.

"I saw them take ownership," he said. "They were just so proud."

In an email, Geffen said construction drawings for additional work at the greenspace were being finalized with a bid package expected to be ready in June.

The Arc purchased the former Meadville Club site in February 2018. Since then Geffen has led the steady effort to design the greenspace and secure funding from a variety of sources to make that design a reality.

"At this point," she said, "I'm very excited to move into construction and hope we can get that moving as soon as possible!"

The fact that the space isn't complete won't prevent it from being used. Geffen said a variety of events are planned for this year, including chalk art workshops, a concert and another movie night. One event takes place Friday when Meadville Neighborhood Center hosts a "fireside chat" on Lyme Disease.



Allison McQuone, (left), Heather Millhorn, Stacy Morris and Geoff Frank begin a game of Yahtzee on Friday at one of the solar-powered tables in The Arc Community Greenspace, located at the intersection of Market Street and Clinton Court. Visitors can now also play Yahtzee online at the greenspace thanks to free WiFi provided by Armstrong.

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