

Code	517017
Subject	Irene Toth
Date	June 19th, 2008
Interviewer	Paula Tucci
Special Notes	West Creek Preservation Committee

minutes:

- 0 sound check
- 1 sound check

Irene Toth born 1925, Ginter PA., family moved to Cleveland in 1928 so father could work in steel Mills, instead of Pennsylvania coal mine, mother worked in woolen mills, lived in Slavic Village area, went to Our Lady of Lourdes church and school until 8th grade, then Notre Dame Academy and College.

Irene is currently serving second term on board of trustees for West Creek Preservation Society, serves as editor for newsletter, has written 8-10 historical articles for newsletter

favorite story, two pages on Henniger family, interviewed great granddaughter of family for information. Henniger house is the oldest house in Parma-West Creek Preservation Committee helped to save house from demolition, will be used as trailhead

West Creek is named for West family, who originally owned the land who came from Virginia. Irene came upon graves of West family, and wrote about West family history for the newsletter as her first story.

West Creek is a grassroots group and every one has a specific "little area" of expertise, they can depend on each other to do work

circulation of newsletter has helped membership, many grants depend on active membership of group

her involvement West Creek began with her husband, Irene continued to attend meetings, helped out for several years by displaying fossils at table at Parma Town to interest people in activities

Originally went to meetings opposed to building retail stores on level three wetlands. Husband had been assistant city engineer for Parma and was opposed to overdevelopment of area and wanted to save green space

husband true naturalist, gave his grandchildren an appreciation and love of nature. Irene was motivated her to go to the meetings by her husband.

timeline of events: meetings, Cleveland Metroparks involvement, group started in 1997,

group had no office, no money, few resources at beginning, good response from city of Parma, but money was tight, original meetings held at Parma Snow library, board meetings at "South West Café".

Just after Irene got involved, Terry Greathouse, professor at Tri-C in biological science, obtained grants and cooperation to create wetlands in a corporate landfill,

heavy rains had created a washout in creek, Greathouse headed project to restore creek to original path,

hurdles explanation of project: hard to explain at first to people what was being done. Now people are grateful for work done, and want to help. Grant money very large, more than \$15 million, but comes with strict control of how money is to be spent.

Recent loss of watershed coordinator, Neal Hesh, who left to take another job. meant they had to hire new coordinator.

Group was often perceived as "anti-business", they are not against business, but expect businesses to respect the environment when building, and why build a new one when there are two empty ones in existence. But most people are really using the land that was saved, and are glad for the park.

People wanted area to stay quiet and undeveloped. Property values were increased by the park, at least at first. Proposal was there to be part of MetroParks in 1920's.

Original developer named the streets with "park" in them, park was always intended to be there.

Irene did not want another golf course, questions how much use existing one has. Landscape changes in her lifetime, too many buildings hurting the environment, more run off from parking lots

Seven Hills promoted development, but they should have developed only one side of Broadview, water runs downhill from Seven Hills side
Confluence purchase where West Creek enters Cuyahoga River flooding, confluence area is under two feet of water when heavy rains hit. Area will be restored, small bank and warehouse will be removed, parking lot will be removed, area will be restored to natural setting, sewer district got grant to restore watersheds, less pollution which enters creek, less work for sewers so some sewer money will be used for confluence, stream will be meandered, and wetlands restored, which will reduce flooding and pollution

Dec 2006 important board meeting about confluence, Irene attended in a body brace, just having had back surgery. Vote was to raise 21/2 million dollars for confluence.

Some money came from state of Ohio
some money came from sewer, some from Trust for Public Grants, who provide short term funding until grant money comes in. Some group members, Dave Lincheck, hard working people on committee who volunteer, some are employed as project managers, part time person hired to keep books. Development director works part time to obtain funding.

future of group: work as land conservancy advocates
group has a good reputation; city of Cleveland approached them to get conservation easement for trail in Seven Hills; even if out of area, it is not out of their mission, Irene feels she can't take credit for projects, many people work hard, she is a "cog" in the wheel
long term goal to tie into towpath trail; must get money to buy land. A section goes from near Henninger house to completed trail in Brooklyn, but troubles with steep cliff which will require complicated engineering

Cleveland Metroparks would like West Creek group to be a model for others wanting to protect watersheds. Time involved in volunteering
buildings demolished at the confluence will be recycled as much as possible, close to 85%

role of Dave Lyncheck in group as director
role of Susan Rovecheck on grant committee, along with others on grants committee

trail studies done to tie in to towpath very involved to present to grants committee

role of board members and how voted in

large turn out of membership to view film "Return of the Cuyahoga", group of
40 people work together very well, work hard, and still enjoy themselves
the passion of the group is evident in the movie, "Return of the Cuyhoga," in the
41 West Creek Park section

42 if West Creek acts as catalyst for other groups, Irene would find that gratifying
43 all members of the group have the passion for nature that John Muir had
44 Irene taught English and History

Irene feels more people do a lot more than she does, but she loves what she
45 does

46 Honor to be on the board

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