

September 23, 2022

Friends of Rotary,

When Bob Test became President of The Rotary Club of Abilene (RCA) in 2005, he placed me in charge of the club fund-raising (Club Service A) for the board of directors; at that time we had no fund-raising programs in place. Due to the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 we lost our venue for our fund raisers called the Shootout Drag Race and the Sunburn Grand Prix at the airport because of the increased security precautions. As the Rotary chair for fund-raising along with members of our club who had connections to the Food & Beverage Industry, we were able to revive the Taste of Abilene in 2006 with the Abilene Restaurant Association (ARA). The Taste of Abilene was an annual event hosted by the ARA for many years. For various reasons the ARA stopped having the event around 1996.

I had the idea in 2006 that our club should try to do something different with fundraising and looked into disc golf as a club project. Disc golf's popularity with college students and adults from 18-35 led to my interest to get RCA involved. Rotary International at the time said clubs should be aware of the aging club members and try to attract younger members. I sought to emulate the TOA-ARA partnership with the Abilene Disc Golf Association (ADGA), formally known as the "West Texas Disc Twisters", for an annual disc golf fundraiser. Initially, my plan was to raise money to have a "pro course" that would attract players and help create new business for Abilene and put our Rotary club in front of the demographic we were targeting to increase membership.

After a meeting with the City of Abilene's Community Services and Parks Director, Mike Hall, I was encouraged to put together a plan for approval from the Abilene Parks Board for the project. In 2007, with the ADGA president, Jerry Kingston, we presented and were approved by the City Parks Board to move forward with the park expansion project to expand the existing nine baskets to a full 18. Together with the ADGA we executed the fund-raiser called the Cal Young Park Expansion Series in 2007 and 2008.

In 2009, I had the idea to connect our event with the Mayor's Council on Physical Fitness. Kayla Christianson served on that board and helped coordinate this initiative with the mayor. This would put us in front of more people and associate the event with the city. That year we had the first Mayor's Cup Disc Golf Tournament. We raised enough money to cover our costs to put on the tournament. (Approximately \$3,575.00 gross income) Total money raised with the ADGA as of 2011 was approximately \$11,000.

Introducing John Houck. Mr. Houck is well-known in the Disc Golf (DG) and Frisbee freestyle community. He is a former world champion and now runs a variety of disc golf related

businesses including disc manufacturing and disc golf equipment. He coordinates tournaments every year and also runs Houck Design which is his company that develops DG courses. DG enthusiasts' respect and follow Houck designed courses for their challenging and unique attributes.

Disc golf course (DGC) design is what led me to Houck. I contacted him in 2006 to discuss the development of a course in Abilene. In early 2007, the RCA and ADGA retained his services with a down payment toward the \$60,000+/- cost of design fees and equipment. The actual location of the course to be developed has been elusive for the next few years. The first location I thought of was the Kirby Lake Dam then to Cal Young Park west of Lytle creek. I also looked at land at Nelson Park by the Abilene Zoo. The city offered land to the east of Kirby Lake, but Houck was not in favor of the area.

I contacted Jerry Kingston, member of the ADGA, about the Abilene State Park (ASP) as a possible site for the DGC. He said that members of the ADGA had thought about that too although they had never pursued the idea. I decided to get in touch with the ASP and spoke with Ranger Rick Thompson, Superintendent of ASA about the idea of developing a course at Lake Abilene inside the ASP in 2012. Disc golf was a new concept for Rick, but I explained what we had been doing for the past few years and he agreed to drive us around the park to look at some areas that he felt might be suitable for the course. Jerry and I rode with Rick and Deputy Ranger, Ryan Hunter. Once we had enough info to send to designer Houck, John said that there was not enough area being offered for an 18-hole course. I set a follow up tour with Houck along and Rangers Thompson and Hunter drove us over to look at the Lake Abilene side of the park. Houck immediately saw the potential and work began to make this the new course.

Then in 2016 after meeting with State Park personnel, we received the Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) approval to construct the course at Lake Abilene. This took four years and many meetings with the local Rangers at the ASP and State officials with the TPWD. Houck began work at the park driving from his home in Austin, TX to study and prepare requested documentation for the state of Texas. He has spent many hours and driven many miles over the next four years. During this time, he has been very motivated and always believed that this would make a great location for a professionally designed championship disc golf course.

Since 2017 to 2021 volunteers have been working to clear the brush and trees under the direction of Houck and the TPWD guidelines. All work has been done by hand held equipment and more than 10,000 hours poured into the preparation. The ADGA has been very committed and the volunteers have mostly used their own equipment at their own expense. In July of 2022, I had a request to the RCA board of directors to pay off the final \$18,500+/- to Houck and they approved. Now that we will be receiving the baskets, tee signs, and other equipment for the course, we are in high gear to have this course installed later this year and will hopefully have a soft open in early 2023.

Rotary is very excited that this project has finally come near completion and are glad to have created friendships with the ADGA and the TPWD. Creating more entry fee revenue for the park by having the disc golf course was part of the desire to make the partnership beneficial to all.

Once this installment is open to the public, our club will be able to continue hosting the annual Mayor's Cup at the course through agreements with the ASP. Our Rotary club along with the ADGA will help name the course with TPWD approval and get recognition for bringing the course to the ASP. The proceeds from the tournament raised by RCA will provide our club with money for our annual grants that will benefit local non-profits and future club projects. What a great way to show our community how much our Rotary Club of Abilene cares for our city!

Service Above Self,

Erik Paul Johnson

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## SUMMARY

2006 I brought the idea of using disc golf as a fund-raising concept to the Rotary Club of Abilene board of directors.

2007 – 2008 Met Jerry Kingston with the West Texas Disc Twisters. Together we met with the city of Abilene for approval to expand the existing nine holes at Cal Young to the other side of the Lytle creek. The Cal Young Park Expansion Series was a tournament created to raise money.

2009 – 2015 In 2009 The Mayor's Cup Disc Golf Tournament was created.

- Total players approximately 50-60 each year
- Total money raised \$38,000 +/-
- Proceeds have been paid towards the new course design and development.
- 2012 Rotary and ADGA paid John Houck \$10,000 to retain his services.

2016 Final approval of course development by the TPWD at Abilene State Park by Lake Abilene. Work begins on clearing the new course. The balance of \$35,000 for the course design and equipment needs funding.

2017-2021 Volunteers are allowed to work on clearing the trees and brush for the course by and with handheld power tools and equipment under the direction of the designer, John Houck.

2021 A formal agreement was drafted at the request of Park Superintendent Ryan Hunter (TPWD) to be agreed and signed by Erik Johnson, RCA and Jerry Kingston, ADGA. The agreement allows for the use of heavy equipment to expedite the clearing and preparation of the DGC for the installation of equipment, tee pads, and signage. The agreement also allows the RCA and ADGA to hold events at the park around fundraising for the course and public awareness of the new course.

2022 Payoff of the course designer and disc golf equipment made in August. Allan Rodgers of the ADGA and many volunteers continue the clearing at the direction of Houck under the guidance of the park Rangers. With the Mayor's Cup Disc Golf Tournament, I continue to raise money to pay for the equipment to use to help speed up the cleaning process.