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Shade trees to be planted at Rotary Park

Federal stimulus funds to help pay for upgrade

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The Liam J. Perk Playground is not the only planned addition to the Rotary Park Environmental Center — future visitors can also expect shade trees. The city, through the efforts of the Urban Forestry Project, has received \$19,000 in federal stimulus funding through the Forest Health Improvement Initiative Grant Program. The funds are designated for tree planting projects on public land and recipients must hire private vendors to provide the trees. "I knew about the grant before the end of last year," said Russell Ringland, project chairman and president of Ringland Construction. "With the backing of the Rotary Club, we put trees in every year." The Urban Forestry Project has planted about 3,400 trees in Cape Coral since its inception five years ago. It currently does about 2,000 per year. Ringland applied in January for the grant for Rotary Park, and the club was notified Wednesday that it had been awarded funding. According to Ringland, the money will pay for 100 trees with a caliber range of 2 inches to 2 1/2 inches. They plan to plant pine, oak and mahogany — all native to the area. "There's less room at the park so we're opting to put in larger trees," he said. "We're getting a little bit bigger tree for the dollar so they mature quicker and can make shade a little bit quicker for the kids." But, Ringland added, it will still take time for the shade trees to grow. "You've got to start somewhere," he said. The city is helping out with the irrigation by reworking the system currently in place, according to Ringland. The project should take less than a week and he is coordinating with the Perk family's spokesman on putting in the trees. "He's leading the drive with the playground equipment," Ringland said. "So I'm going to make sure the job gets done when it needs to get done so everything is perfect for their grand opening." On Dec. 22, 2-year-old Liam Perk was severely bitten in the neck by Lloyd, the family's 8-year-old male Weimaraner, at their home on Southeast 45th Terrace. Liam was rushed to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Lee County Animal Services removed Lloyd from the home along with Chessy, a female Weimaraner also owned by the family. Lloyd was euthanized the next day, but Chessy was returned to Liam's parents, Joey and Carrie Perk. With the help of the Cape Coral Community Foundation, the Perks created the Liam J. Perk Foundation Fund to honor Liam with a playground in his name and to educate parents and dog owners through seminars, events and school presentations, providing a safer environment for kids and dogs as a family. Construction began last week on the playground, located at 5505 Rose Garden Road. Nearly 5,000 square feet, the playground along with other improvements to the park is valued at \$220,000. Organizers anticipate putting it up in April, according to the family's spokesman, Henry Posey. A dedication for the playground is scheduled for May 15. Ringland said the timing could not have been better for the projects. "It was fortunate for us to have this in the works," he said of the grant. Other cities have paid \$200,000 for similar, big shade structures. "And we're doing it for under \$19,000," Ringland said. Rotarian Elmer Tabor agreed. "Every time we get a grant like this, we get excited because it's one more project we can complete," he said. "It's absolutely great. We've built the whole park off of donations, grants and scholarships." Tabor also noted the timing of the two

projects. "It came at the perfect time because we can do the installing of the trees at the same time as putting in the playground," he said. Ringland also applied for a second grant for the Rotary Club through the Urban Forestry Project. The club received partial funding, which will cover 200 trees just west of Chiquita Boulevard on Veterans Memorial Parkway. Ringland urged any students or school clubs interested in volunteering to help plant the trees to contact him at russr@ringlandconstruction.com. To donate to the Liam J. Perk Foundation Fund, contact the Cape Coral Community Foundation at 542-5594 or visit: capecoralcf.planyourlegacy.org.

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