

# Yampa River Botanic Park

## The Early History of the Park

### **It All Started with the Trail**

At the time of building the Trail in the early 1990s the City said it would not condemn land and anticipated that the Trail would go around Fish Creek Mobile Home Park, then owned by Bob & Audrey Enever. It would have required two underpasses under the railroad tracks to get back to the River. The Enevers supported the building of the Trail and proposed to the City that it route the Trail along the River through FCMHP to greatly improve the Trail and save the City a lot of money for underpasses. The Enevers proposed to exchange the right-of-way through the mobile home park for some of the land owned by Cookie Lockhart that the City did not yet own, but had been trying to buy. The youth soccer people had been pressing the City to buy this land for several years but it had never been able to come to terms with Cookie. The cost savings from avoiding the underpasses incentivized the City to pay Cookie's price and buy the land that is now Emerald Park and the Botanic Park. This permitted the City to give 6 acres to the Enevers in exchange for the Trail Easement. The Enevers gave this land back to the City for a park, which the City initially named 'Enever Park'.

### **A Deal with the City**

As late as the early '90s there were very few gardens in Routt County. The cowboy culture of earlier days didn't favor digging and planting, except perhaps for wheat and oats. City Council Members were not enthusiastic about the Enevers' plan to build a Park with trees and flower gardens on this land, their concern being that the City might get stuck having to maintain the park. The Enevers assured them that they would build the Park themselves and they put \$1 million dollars into an endowment fund so the City would not have to worry about future costs. The Enevers said they'd create and give this Park to the City and maintain it at their expense if the City would service the Park's equipment and handle the administration, so they could concentrate their efforts on the Park itself. That is still the deal today.

### **1994-2000 the Enevers created the Park with their own money and sweat.**

During the winter of 1994/5 Bob Enever worked with Michael Campbell to develop the concepts of the berms, roads, gardens and ponds which became the design for the Park. A key design idea was "no straight lines," which has contributed to the Park's non-institutional appearance. Bob devoted two years of his life to building the Park. He was on the job every day for the summers of 1995-6. Friend and contractor CD Johnson was his daily adviser in 1995 showing him how to turn the flat horse pasture into the shapes shown on the drawings. He imported 10,000 cubic yards of dirt and dug the ponds, which provided the pit-run gravel for the roads. He lined the ponds with a foot of clay. In 1996 he had the irrigation system built, planted the trees, finished the roads and started on the trail system. The Enevers put a second \$1 million into the construction of the Park and early gardens, spread over several years. The City built a combined parking lot for Emerald Park and the Botanic Park, providing the latter with an access corridor at the east end of the ball fields.

### **Mission**

A mission statement was agreed on early: "A place of Serenity celebrating the Trees, Shrubs, Plants and Birds of the Yampa Valley". Serenity was built into the Park by the construction of the berms and the planting of 500 trees, which deflected and absorbed traffic sounds. In 2002 school children planted another hundred trees along Botanic Walk to further reduce the sound of US40 traffic. Kerry Kaster planted the Park's first garden in 1997 and the gates were opened so the public could see

its newest Park. A Park Supervisor was hired, Gayle Lehman\*, who supervises the Park to this day. Most of the gardens were created after the Park was opened.

### **The Association**

The Enevers originally planned on creating a 501c3 corporation to receive the land and maintain the Park, but they wanted the permanence of a City park and did not want the frailty and expense of another corporate entity with its administration costs. So they instead arranged with the City to create the Association and delegate the management of the Park to the Association. At first the Enevers **were** the Association but they wanted the public to participate in and manage the future of the Park. Starting in 1997, members of the public have become progressively more involved and now completely run the Board, the Association and the Park. The Association now numbers about 425 paying members. The Association, led by several long-standing Board Members\*, has brought enthusiasm, outside money and great ambitions for the Park, far exceeding anything the Enevers had in mind when they started.

### **Volunteers**

The public also participates by volunteering to work at the Park. 'Social Gardening' was started in the late '90s and continues today and crowds come to the spring planting of the Annuals Garden. Some people work on their own Sponsored Gardens while others come to work in the Park at times convenient to them.

### **No Tax Money**

What started as a plan for the financial independence of the Park has become a part of the ethic of the Association. The City, as the Park's partner, helps the Park with in-kind services but gives no money. The Park receives no tax money.

### **Award**

In 2012 the City of Steamboat Springs awarded the Enevers its Heritage Award, which is awarded every two years to people who have contributed to the Community.



Bob & Audrey Enever