

Making a splash

Popular downtown water playground includes 'green' benefits



THE SHERIDAN PRESS | JUSTIN SHEELY

Seven-year-old Anna LaFountain leaps over a water nozzle in the splash fountain Tuesday afternoon at Whitney Commons.

Water recycled, used in other city parks

BY ALISA BRANTZ
THE SHERIDAN PRESS

SHERIDAN — Walking through Whitney Commons on a sunny summer day in Sheridan you are likely to hear squeals of joy and surprise coming from the splash park.

The popularity of this free local playground with a soaking spin is no secret as families gather every warm afternoon for a cooling dash through the many fountainheads.

The facility opened to the public in 2003 and has been a popular play place since, but after the complete renovation of the "sprayground" two years ago the attraction is busier than ever.

Whitney Benefits Board President Tom Kinnison said the idea for the park was in place long before he joined the board, though it came to fruition under him.

"It was one of those items that seemed to be of concern for the community for quite some time," he said. "Mr. Whitney was concerned about the youth of the community and we thought that would be a way to give back."

As the popularity grew, so did the splash park.

The expansion not only allowed more room for more kids to frolic with the addition of fountainheads, but also expanded the operating schedule to add more hours of use while reducing the water used.

Have you ever wondered what happens to the water after it gets sucked back down the drains?

It is not recycled back to the fountains; all of the water spraying about is fully treated, clean city water.

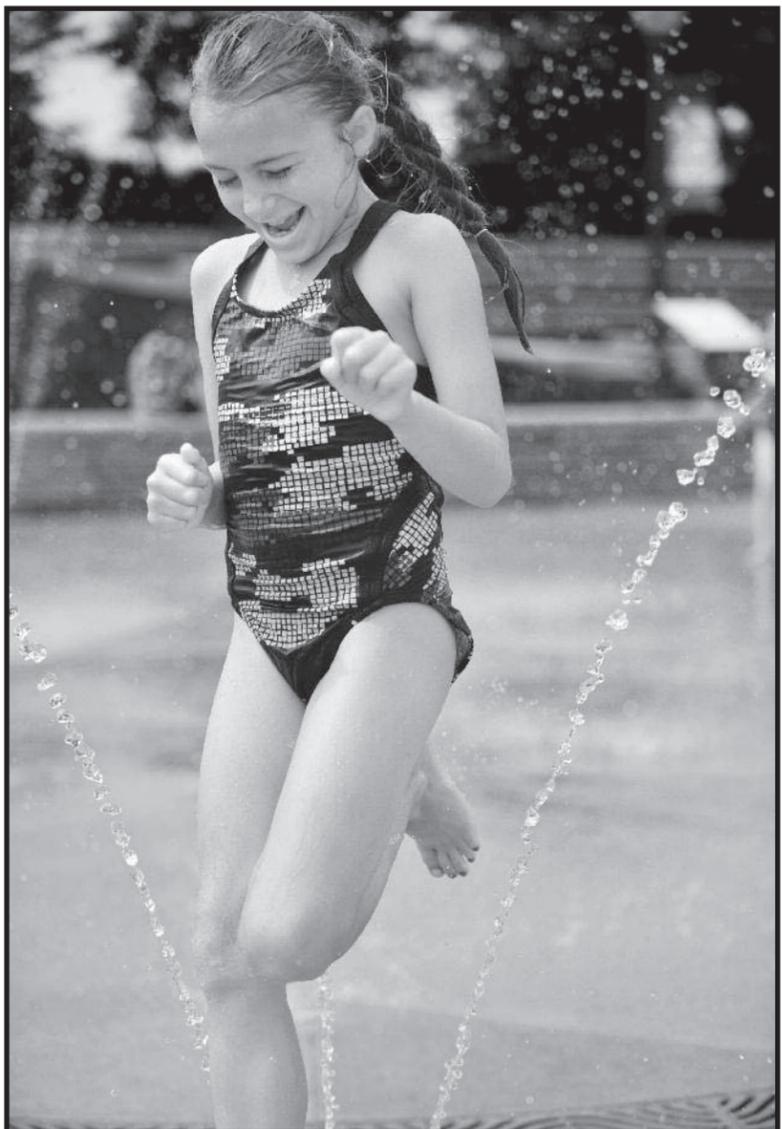
Underneath all the fun is a 24,000-gallon holding tank that pumps and pressurizes the used water from the fountains and uses it nightly to water the grass throughout the community parks.

"Any park you go to in this town that's green, we provide the water," Whitney Benefits Executive Director Patrick Henderson said.

The foundation owns a reservoir in the mountains. The water from the reservoir comes to town via the Big Goose Creek and is pumped into the city system to be treated. In exchange for the ability to clean and distribute their water, Whitney gifts 50 million gallons of water to the community every year.

"What it does is it keeps our town green and in case of an emergency we would have drinking water for our residents," Henderson said, adding that the foundation is very proud of their splash park and the system in place.

"I've never seen a community park that's free to the residents of that quality," he said. "I wish we had something like that when my kids were young."



Seven-year-old Anna LaFountain leaps over a water nozzle in the splash fountain Tuesday afternoon at Whitney Commons.

Kinnison echoed Henderson's sentiment.

"It has been a wonderful thing for Sheridan," he said.

"It's just something that is a little different for the community and it's been a wonderful success."