

SEPT/OCT 2018 | VOL 34, NO 5

WWW.ALCC.COM

# COLORADO green

Official publication of ALCC serving

industry in the Rocky Mountain region

**Recruit more women**  
**Maintaining suburbanitat**





# Maintaining suburbia

## Diverse stakeholders join forces at Chapungu

By Lyn Dean

**"We** knew we could turn the park around," says Chason Geister, branch manager and business development, Environmental Designs, Inc., Henderson. Geister was talking about Chapungu Sculpture Park (pronounced cha-poon-goo) at Centerra in Loveland.

"Maintenance at Chapungu is a complicated scenario. A developer, a municipal metro district, a nonprofit environmental organization and our landscape company teamed up and made it work!"

Photo courtesy MATHINNEY







Photos courtesy McWHINNEY



Chapungu Park's 26 acres in Loveland are home to 82 Zimbabwean stone sculptures. Each distinctive stone sculpture is handmade from indigenous Zimbabwe stones and the exhibit, titled "Chapungu: Stories in Stone – An African Perspective of Family," is the first permanent exhibit of its kind in the United States.

The park is one of Northern Colorado's most heavily trafficked multiuse areas—a venue for concerts, weddings, farmers markets and more. It is meant to look as natural as possible while being a manicured landscape. Maintenance standards are high.

**This was a team effort  
and the combined work  
exceeded expectations!**

McWHINNEY, a real estate development company, donated the land for the Chapungu Sculpture Park in 2007. The company's purpose is to "create great places for people" and that commitment is shared by all involved with Chapungu.

### Suburbitat

Creating the park as a "suburbitat" was the goal of High Plains Environmental Center (HPEC), a Loveland-based nonprofit, and Centerra Metropolitan District (CMD). As such, Chapungu is designed to have a mixture of native and manicured areas. The manicured areas must look natural, not artificial. Fully native natural areas attracting wildlife exist only about 50 feet from walking paths or manicured turf. "The park has an aesthetic that appeals to people on a sensual level," says Geister.

Restoration and preservation are the park's key maintenance priorities. Environmental Designs (EDI), Jim Tolstrup, HPEC execu-





Photo courtesy Danny Dodge

tive director, and CMD representatives tour the property monthly, from April through October, to confirm BMPs and the stricter OLM practices are being carried out. OLM, Inc. is one of the country's largest contract management companies and believes property managers must enhance and maintain the marketability of a property. Hence the adherence to strict maintenance requirements.

In addition to the formal monthly inspections, Tolstrup, who ensures Chapungu matches required environmental standards, and Geister make regular inspections throughout the season.

### Deep adherence to BMPs

Geister is an irrigation pro with a solid track record of success and when McWHINNEY, CMD and High Plains were looking for a new company to maintain the park, he made the case for upgraded irrigation equipment and practices.

"In 2015, I said 'we can't save the park—meaning create the park you want—with the current irrigation system,'" Geister recalls. "I didn't promise a quick fix, but I knew our team could turn the park around within two to three seasons with the right changes to the irrigation system and the right plant choices."

High Plains trusted him and he was good to his word. By the end of the 2017 season, regular monthly inspections by stakeholder entities were meeting BMP and OLM standards.

Geister says his team has become very

skilled at mechanical edging and hand pruning since string trimming and shearing are not acceptable practices because they damage plants. Limited use of leaf blowers is allowed.

### Serving two masters

"It's a little complicated," Geister admits. "Multiple stakeholders want to ensure outstanding park maintenance to preserve the positive public image of the park and preserve the environment."

Centerra Metro District manages the property and water budget and High Plains Environmental Center ensures the park has areas with native plants that create habitat conducive for urban wildlife. It is HPEC that contracted with EDI for maintenance. "CMD is the 'mother organization' and High Plains manages the park. It's like having two bosses."

### Irrigation revamp and plant selection

The changing irrigation schedule is one of the biggest maintenance challenges at Chapungu. Irrigation is not allowed during booked events at the park. For example, irrigation may have to be postponed for 4-5 days if there are back-to-back late-night concerts.

In 2016, EDI introduced high efficiency upgrades. Three ET Water smart controllers were installed across the property as well as high efficiency spray nozzles and drip irrigation. Each controller has a separate master valve with a flow sensor. Additionally, low-water Plant Select® choices were installed in beds

under the supervisor of HPEC so plant health could be sustained when irrigation is postponed.

In past years, maintenance included careful inspection of plants on the property and hand watering of stressed plants was required but Geister says for the past three seasons, no hand watering has been needed. The controller upgrades have allowed us to be much more dynamic in our approach to irrigating the park. Geister's team uses actual real time weather data to determine irrigation programming on a daily basis, which, in part, helps to fulfill the park's mission to enhance and accentuate the environment instead of greatly altering it.

"We don't hinder Mother Nature but include her in our work," Geister says. "The added side benefit is saving water! This is the work we are trying to accomplish through CMD and have literally saved the district millions of gallons of water in the process."

"The project was not without its eggshell moments," he says. "Even with the smartest technology, if the system doesn't get the message, it doesn't function as expected." During the season, the sprinklers came on one evening during a concert when the programmed controller didn't get the message. Geister fixed the problem as soon as he knew about it and it was a good lesson about trusting in technology.

By 2017, the fruits of the EDI team's labor for the previous two seasons were realized. "You don't get an ELITE Award level property without a couple of seasons of hard work. This was a team effort and the combined work exceeded expectations!" He adds that trust of the client groups was huge. They were willing to wait it out and the result is a win for all stakeholder groups. Environmental Designs received the ELITE Maintenance Award for the property in 2018. | CG



Photo courtesy Environmental Designs, Inc.

Chason Geister