

Cori's Corner: A place for sharing and contemplation

■ Former Riverside family donates to park funding in memory of their daughter who passed away earlier this year

By JAMIE MACMILLAN

Cori Sikich loved nature from butterflies to rainbows to hiking. It's appropriate then that there will be a section honoring her memory within Riverside's new Patriot's Park along 26th Street, which, among its attractions, includes walking trails and a butterfly garden.

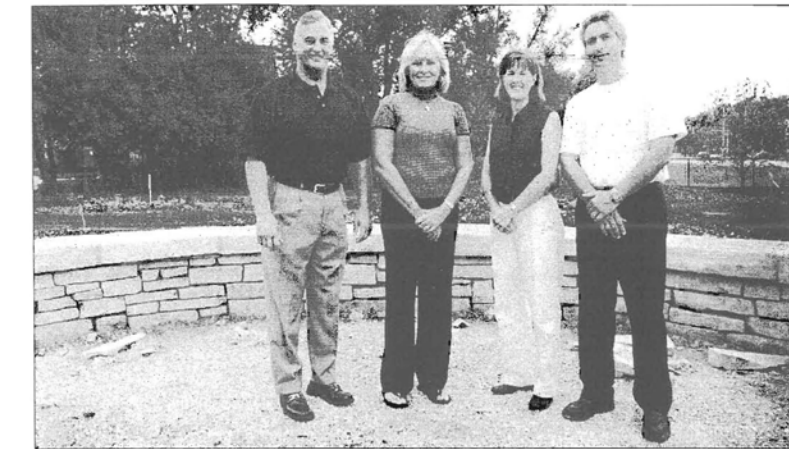
"To have a place out in the open, in a nature-centered park really keeps her true spirit alive," said her mother Susan Sikich.

Cori died of a heart attack back in June, her body systems worn out due to complications from eating disorders she developed while in college at Virginia Tech. She was 25 years old.

While the Sikichs moved away from Riverside to Virginia when Cori and her twin sister Megan were 12, the family keeps strong ties to the village. They remain members of the Riverside Presbyterian Church, where they held Cori's memorial services. Cori and Megan attended Blythe Park Elementary School before moving out of town, but Megan has since relocated back and is a current village resident.

In Cori's memory, the family will remain an influence in the village. The family has made a gracious and heart-felt donation of \$50,000 to the village to go towards paying the construction costs of the Patriot's Park, the village's new park in northeastern Riverside along 26th Street.

The park will have two play areas devoted to young children, progressive landscaping like a butterfly garden, crushed-granite walking paths, an undisturbed meadow area to be used for games like bocce and Frisbee and council ring areas. One of those council rings will be dubbed Cori's Corner and her parents envision the circle as a place of refuge for teens and young children to talk about their problems with a parent, friend or advisor away from the public eye. Her mother said that through Cori's courageous fight against her disorders they learned not just how debilitating the problem is, but also that such disorders carry a level of so-



(Left to right) John Sikich, Susan Sikich, Riverside's Recreation Department Chair Joe Ballerine and Director of Parks and Recreation Laure Kosey gathered at a new park along 26th Street to debut Cori's Corner, in memory of the Sikich's daughter, Cori. (Photo by Josh Hawkins)

cial stigma. It's a stigma that makes it difficult and emotional for teens or young adults to be open with their problem and realize they need help. While Cori recognized her health issues, checking into hospital programs three different times in an attempt to beat it, others do not and Susan hopes that the Cori's Corner parcel of the new park offers a comfortable place to work through any and all of life's troubles. Her mother said that the message behind Cori's health troubles is that life is short and problems must be dealt with quickly before its impact grows to big to overcome.

"It's a statement that while her life was short, it had meaning," Susan said. "We want this to be something that's got more than just her name on it. We want it to be a learning center, a place for kids to go to talk about their problems and get help."

The monetary donation will also get the village's recreation department closer to its fund raising goal. Overall, the construction costs will exceed \$306,000, although \$153,000 is covered through a state recre-

ation grant. Village recreation officials have pledged to fund raise for the other half to help offset the funds being taken out of the village's coffers that were used so the project could begin.

While the recreation department has received a series of corporate donations from local businesses and organizations like Riverside Bank and the Junior Woman's Club, most of its money raising efforts have centered around the sales of dedicated brick pavers. Over 300 people have purchased brick pavers which will be installed in a council ring area in the middle of the park. The park itself will be opened and dedicated this Sunday, but the brick paver sale will continue until the funds are completely recovered.

This weekend's dedication ceremony will take place at 4 p.m. Sept. 8. The dedication and park is in honor of the men and women, past and present, from Riverside and the nation, who have dedicated their lives to our country's freedom, especially those heroes who came to the forefront in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

With the Sikich family's donation, Recreation Director Laure Kosey reported that the village is closing the gap on its fund raising goal and remains \$20,000 short. Kosey said the Sikichs are generous people who want their daughter to be remembered.

"This is isn't about money, it's about doing something good so their daughter's memory will live on," Kosey said of the Sikich's donation. "People will say 'let's go to Patriot's Park and meet at Cori's Corner.'"

The Sikichs are now back living in the Chicago area, residing in the city during the construction season so John can monitor his highway construction business. Cori worked for him at the company. Otherwise, the couple lives in Florida. While their donation will help the funding of the new park, they noted that more than anything they see the grant as an "investment towards society."

"One saving grace is the fact that Cori is no longer in pain," Susan said. "She taught us lessons with her life, and we want to contribute the meager talents and abilities we have to impact change."