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Time outdoors helps you cope with COVID-19-related stress - by Roberto DaSilva

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Roberto DaSilva
City of
East Providence

As our nation continues to encounter the many challenges presented by COVID-19 there is still positive news to report. A growing body of research indicates that spending time outdoors can help many of us to cope with COVID-19-related stress. In the era of quarantines and social distancing many people have turned to nature to help their mental and physical wellbeing. In fact, many medical professionals are now recommending outside activities as an effective prescription to improve overall public health.

East Providence boasts a wide range of public and accessible open space parcels for residents. In total there are approximately 800 acres of open space, which offer opportunities for hiking, recreational activities and wildlife habitation. In addition, there are another 1,000 acres of semi-public lands in our city, which provide comparable benefits to our community.

Having a strong public parks system can increase a community's attractiveness to prospective residents. A recent survey indicates that 85 percent of US residents say proximity to parks and recreational areas are an important factor in deciding where to live. Parks improve property values and strengthen neighborhoods while also providing important environmental benefits.

East Providence is committed to investing in our parks and recreational fields. Most recently, East Providence has made significant upgrades to the venerable Pierce Field. Upcoming improvements are also planned for many other facilities including Willett Pond and Grassy Plain Park.

The city is also truly fortunate to partner with a newly-formed citizen group – EP Urban Forest. EP Urban Forest is a community group working to enhance and sustain the health and beauty of East Providence's trees for future generations. East Providence's Planning Department staff have been working with this group of residents since February 2020, providing staff support and technical assistance. The group is interested in conducting outreach and education to their fellow neighbors

on the importance of trees for climate change, public health and community well-being.

Earlier this year, the city of East Providence applied for a grant from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Forestry Division to conduct a public tree inventory. The grant was awarded to East Providence in August 2020 and will launch this fall, providing funding to purchase specialized tree inventory software. EP Urban Forest will work with the City to conduct the inventory, with the help of resident volunteers. Johnson & Wales University professor of environmental science Mark Hengen, a former city forester, joined the group to provide his expertise in conducting urban forestry studies. Our long-term goal is to create a comprehensive citywide Urban Forestry Plan.

East Providence will also be partnering with Rhode Island Tree Council to explore ways to provide homeowners with trees to plant on their property.

As we enter the fall and winter seasons, we encourage you to visit East Providence's natural areas. Please share your experience by using #EPOutdoorsRX. Time spent among trees is never wasted time. For a list of East Providence trails and parks, please visit <http://www.eastprovidence.com/content/12105/9874/default.aspx>. Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of East Providence, R.I.

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