



Scenic Overlook

From the day of its opening in July 2005, Minnie Ha Ha Park has been a smashing success, and this success is being followed up as more lands and new recreational opportunities are added.

Minnie Ha Ha is located within the City of Sunset Hills, Missouri, a community of over 8,000 people located in southwest St. Louis County. The western boundary of the city is a four-mile section of the Meramec River.

The Meramec is a medium sized stream flowing out of the Ozark uplands generally northeast to the Mississippi River, south of the City of St. Louis. It has long been a popular recreation attraction because of such features as its scenic beauty, swimming, boating, fishing, hiking and camping. In 1975, several area governments, including Sunset Hills, jointly embarked on an effort to restore deteriorated parts of this river, and their cooperative effort has been most successful. The area is now recognized as the Meramec Greenway.

Sunset Hills current initiative began in the late 1990's with completion of a city park and recreation plan, which included focusing on their Meramec River frontage. Then, when a 25-acre parcel was offered for sale in 2000, the City quickly purchased it.

This parcel already had a name, Minnie Ha Ha, and a reputation. In the early twentieth century it was a privately owned recreation attraction, complete with a beach, boat rental, food and drink concessions, a dance pavilion and picnic grounds. The reputation it had was a good one, a place of fun and happy times for a generation of folks from the St. Louis region.

In recent years, however, the 25 acres had been abandoned, and almost forgotten even though thousands of people drove by it on busy Highway 30 every day. Many though it suffered the fate of similar lands along the river, becoming a wasteland from illegal dumping and littered with debris from past floods.

When officials from Sunset Hills inspected it in 2000, they did see some misuse, but they also saw great opportunity. During its vacant years, for example, an impressive forest had grown on the property, and this could become a positive setting for a unique new park.





Sunset Hills did purchase Minnie Ha Ha and did embark on a major cleanup, which included lots of volunteer help. They prepared a master plan and set about assembling funds to pay for development. They were successful in gathering several grants, and, in July 2005 cut the ribbon on their first park in the Meramec Greenway. Minnie Ha Ha featured picnic pavilions, restrooms, playgrounds and trails along with new roads and parking lots. The residents of Sunset Hills as well as other folks from the area were pleasantly amazed that such a jewel was there all the time, just needing a bit of polishing.

Following up on their initial success, the city next developed a scenic overlook in the park. Designed by Horner & Shifrin and constructed by Gershenson Construction Company, this unique feature was completed late in 2005. It incorporates the beauty of the surroundings in its design and location and adds to the park's diversity.

In 2007 Sunset Hills acquired 18 acres of open space land east of the original property and then an additional 16 acres to the north. The latter parcel, also fronting on the Meramec River, is located on the other side of Missouri Highway 30, and was previously a privately operated athletic complex. The original Minnie Ha Ha land will be linked to the new north parcel via a trail beneath the Highway 30 Meramec River Bridge. This trail is now under construction. The athletic complex, consisting of four softball fields, will remain operational under management by the city.

Hence Minnie Ha Ha is now a 59-acre park and features an expanding diversity of recreational opportunities in a pleasant forested setting along the river. There will, for example, be about 2.5 miles of asphalt surfaced trail completed by the summer of 2008.

Minnie Ha Ha is serving its constituency well and is open to all other visitors. It is an example of turning an eyesore into a positive asset, as other communities in the Meramec Greenway have done, serving not only the people but helping in the recovery of the river resource. Well done, Sunset Hills.

For more information about Minnie Ha Ha Park, including directions to reach it, visit the City of Sunset Hills website.

View of Meramec and Gravois Road Bridge from the scenic overlook.



Minnie Ha Ha Trail