Once the UL Lafayette Horse Farm, Moncus Park slated for completion in spring 2019

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Moncus Park, formerly known as The Horse Farm, is currently undergoing Phase 1 of construction to its approximately 100 acres of undeveloped land in central Lafayette, slated for completion in spring 2019.

Heavy machinery and construction equipment tread dirt, turning it fresh, while orange fences stand vigil over the hardy oak trees that dot flat grassland.

"Tons and tons of contracted staff, tons of architects and construction companies," said Elizabeth “EB” Brooks, executive director for Moncus Park, one of the people involved in the parks development.

Brooks is a team of three full-time staff members, employed by Lafayette Central Park, Inc., a non-profit founded by the Lafayette Consolidated Government, who initiated the 99-year lease that will have Lafayette Central Park oversee development and operations of Moncus Park.

The other two primary staff include Kelly Courville, director of philanthropy and Holly Cope-Lynn, outreach and administrative coordinator.

The money to fund contract work, as Brooks explained, comes from private donors.

A primary donation came from James Moncus who, according to the Moncus Park website, "carries out his community vision through the James Devin Moncus Family Foundation ... (that) believes hard work, dedication, and an entrepreneurial spirit are keys to a full and rich life."

Brooks noted some of the features being added to Moncus Park with Phase 1 are an entrance off Johnston Street, a two-way bridge across the coulee for vehicles, a dog park, a rain garden for stormwater management, a promenade, more trees and a "really pretty wetland-lined pond that has boardwalks and a beautiful iris garden."

Brooks also detailed Phase 2, which will start in early spring of next year. Among the phase's features are an amphitheater, tree house, mini golf course and farmer's market pavilion.

Donors helped fund individual features and amenities for the park, so individual features are scheduled for phases according to when they are funded, Brooks explained.

Of the Farmer's Market, which bustles with local vendors selling homemade goods and products, Brooks said they operate independently from Moncus Park.

The decision to create a Farmer's Market Pavilion was from community-based wants, Brooks added. The master plan came into fruition as the result of several sessions, where residents of Lafayette and the surrounding communities participated in discussion on what to develop.

Passed in December 2013, Brooks added that the master plan has combined elements from surveys of over 7,400 people, which is not uncommon for a city park.

"On some level, the chance to build a new city park in the middle of the city, that is what is really unique," Brooks said, who then described it as a rare opportunity, with social media technologies that allow them to work with community members unlike before.

When she was a senior at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Brooks became involved in the Save the Horse Farm campaign, the result of her friend being told she could no longer live in the Horse Farm's student housing property — a small white house that once resided in the front. This was when UL Lafayette planned to rezone the first 36 acres for commercial development and to sell it for land closer to campus.

The Save the Horse Farm campaign was a student-led protest, with Brooks and her friend as co-founders.

"We had a petition that got over 40,000 signatures, rally, candlelight vigils in front of the president's house, public speaking with community leaders," Brooks said.

In 2012 (seven years later), former City-Parish President Joey Durel negotiated with UL Lafayette to purchase the land.

Brooks said she remained involved in the ongoings of the Horse Farm, and after earning her master's in urban planning and design at the University of Austin, became involved with Lafayette Central Park.

"I told the board chair, 'I'd like to step up and apply for the job, this is like my dream job, you know,'" Brooks said.

When Brooks landed the position, architecture firms began approaching with drafts for the park, but she has stayed true to her roots in the park.

"There are so many in love with how the park came to be saved," Brooks said, "and I think it would be wrong to rob them of the design process.

"If we really want to feel like an exciting place, like a world-class city that will attract people and bring all the businesses to continue to grow, I mean, we need a great park like this," Brooks added.

Brook has been involved with the parks development for 13 years. She said she finds the process both humbling and surreal.

"I'm really grateful for all the residents who have worked to make this come to life. It makes me proud of Lafayette and Acadiana. It really could have been a strip mall and a gated community right now, but thousands of people put their foot down," Brooks said.

For more information and to stay updated on Moncus park, visit their website at moncuspark.org. They can also be followed on Facebook @ LafayetteCentralPark.