

Havenwoods is the state's only urban forest and is located in Milwaukee.

# It's a natural playground for people of all ages

BUT HAVENWOODS STATE FOREST HAS A HECK OF A HISTORY.

*Marcus Smith*

A trio of millennials is seated at an outdoor table drinking bottled water and congratulating each other on completing the Havenwoods Run/Walk. A customer stands at the Friends of Havenwoods sales counter deciding on a purchase. Two children giggle and peer out from a tent. It's the Havenwoods Harvest Fest and it's hopping.

Harvest Fest is an opportunity for children to learn outdoor skills like archery, crafts and helping make a campfire. The event is hosted by the Havenwoods State Forest, the state's only urban forest. The Milwaukee site attracts more than 40,000 visitors annually and is especially busy during its annual fall and winter festivals.

The staff provides programs for families, adults and day care centers. Visitors can borrow snowshoes to use on the grounds, GPS units for the property's geocaching adventure, binoculars, and other items for discovering nature.

There's an active volunteer crew at Havenwoods, helping with everything from festivals to land management. Support for many of the property's operations comes from Friends of Havenwoods and the Master Gardeners of Mil-

waukee County UWEX.

Judy Klippel has worked at Havenwoods for 30 years, first as a youth program coordinator, and more recently as superintendent since 1993. She describes Havenwoods as a learning facility. It's located in a city neighborhood and short walking distance from the Berryland Housing Development, and as such, provides residents with the opportunity to "explore nature in a location that many city folks may not have easy access to," according to Klippel. "We want them to realize that nature is right in their backyard, so we connect with schools and orga-

nizations to help them get here to have programs that get them outdoors."

Working with its Friends group, Havenwoods plans for its future by forging a partnership with the Havenwoods Economic Development Corporation.

Stephanie Harling is the executive director of the organization. She explains that the partnership came about because Havenwoods is a "huge asset for the community and the city at large, so it seemed like a natural fit that we would look for ways to partner with the forest in promoting it as an asset."

Harling believes Havenwoods should be viewed as an economic driver for the community and be used as a venue to attract new homeowners, businesses and investment to the area.

Havenwoods is located in the 4th Senate District. Located right in the heart of an urban center, it is a valuable tool for young people to learn about the outdoors.

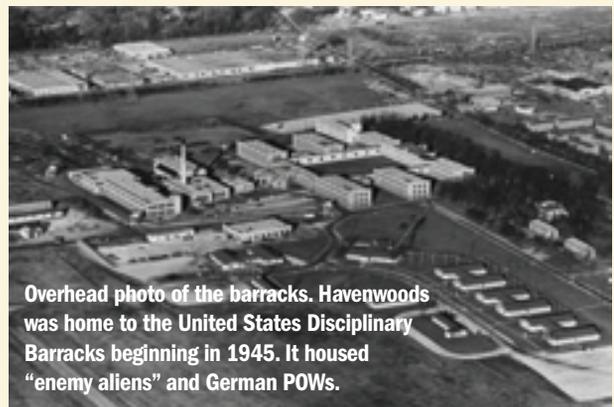
Havenwoods has been widely used for 120 years, but not always as a playground for people of all ages. In fact, its story traces to the beginning of the 20th century as a place to house prisoners.

## Cultivating character for inmates

In the late 1890s, the first House of Corrections in Milwaukee had a daily population exceeding 400 with over 2,500 inmates a year. Milwaukee County officials agreed it should be relocated from Milwaukee's south side and received legislative authority to relocate in 1903.

According to Ralph M. Aderman's book, "Trading Post to Metropolis: Milwaukee County's First 150 Years," "Political complications soon developed and the decision making process atrophied until 1913. In the aftermath of a citizen's report critical of the south side facility, plans for a new facility quickly jelled."

The facility opened in November 1917 on 400 acres in the Town of Granville. In



Overhead photo of the barracks. Havenwoods was home to the United States Disciplinary Barracks beginning in 1945. It housed "enemy aliens" and German POWs.

COLIN SANDELL

time, the land would become Milwaukee's northwest side and Havenwoods.

Inmates worked there at an onsite chair factory and farm. In an addendum to the "House of Corrections Annual Report for 1917," B. Ogden Chisolm from the Prison Association of New York wrote that the shift to farming occurred despite inmates being "beggars and burglars." Many, Chisolm added, were "victims of circumstances," who would change for the better if given the chance.

"It was for this very purpose of redeeming these men thru life in the open, and to provide better working conditions, that the farm scheme was established," wrote Chisolm.

In his 1917 annual report to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, House of Corrections Inspector William H. Momsen reported that, "176 acres have been under cultivation, and as many as 60 men have been employed at that time."

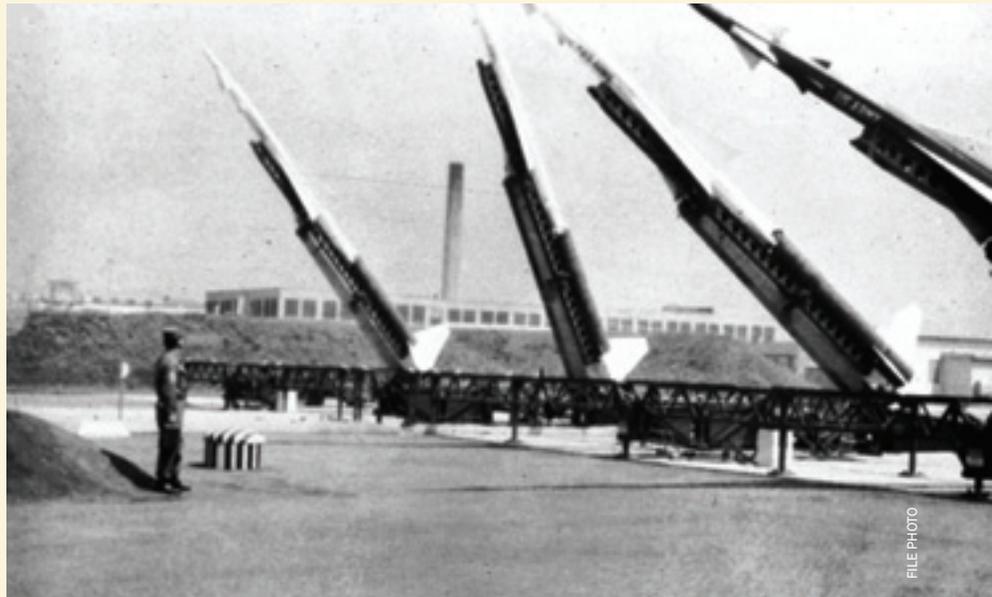
Momsen's 1917 report listed farm output: corn (on the cob) and potatoes both generated 1,800 bushels; 2,200 pounds of dressed veal; and 7,250 pounds of dressed pork. The farm produced carrots, wax beans and lettuce among other vegetables. The amount of dairy products was impressive with inmates responsible for 42,000 gallons of milk, 90 dozen eggs and 1,110 pounds of butter.

The House of Corrections operated on the site until 1945 when the Army took the land to use as a disciplinary barracks, housing "enemy aliens" and German prisoners of war, according to historian John Gurda. The House of Corrections then moved to its present location in Franklin, Wisconsin.

### The military moves in

After World War II, America faced the threat posed by Soviet bombers and Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). John A. Martini and Stephan A. Haller in their book, "What We Have We Shall Defend," noted that the United States responded by creating a defense infrastructure of anti-aircraft installations, state-of-the-art early warning radar and the Nike Ajax missile.

In 1956, Havenwoods became one of eight Nike missile sites in the Milwaukee area. But over time, Department of Defense officials realized the 30-mile range of the Nike was no match for Russia's long range missiles, thus, the Nike missile site was abandoned in 1963. The U.S. Army, though, continued to use the land as a training facility until 1967.



FILE PHOTO

In 1956, Havenwoods became one of eight Nike missile sites in the Milwaukee Area.



LEENHOUTS & GUTHERIE ARCHITECTURAL FIRM

The second House of Corrections opened in 1917 at Havenwoods. The site had a chair factory and working farm.



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS CENTER

An illustration of the display mall envisioned for the site. The drawing, along with other recommendations for developing the site, was prepared for the City of Milwaukee by the University of Wisconsin Environmental Awareness Center in 1977.

It took until 1996 before the three missile silos were demolished. Although each silo was covered by concrete, Klippel says she was happy to see them go. She told *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter Don Behm, they are a "safety hazard because they attract children and young adults who consider it a challenge to enter them."

In 1970, the Army declared the land surplus and it became the property of the city of Milwaukee. Civic and local government officials began offering potential uses for the site.

### Exploring nature in the city

The Center for Civic Initiative proposed a "mini-city," according to a June 26, 1970, *Milwaukee Journal* article. The plan called for the construction of 700 town houses on 55 acres, 10 acres for retail, 7 acres for an elementary school and 80 acres for the Milwaukee Area Technical College.

The plan faced stiff opposition from some of the 50 local residents who attended a public hearing on the proposal at a neighborhood school. They feared the plan would "increase pressure on Custer High School" and were concerned about the cost to taxpayers. City officials had earlier shared their desire with the media to add the land to its industrial land bank, and city planners were uncomfortable about paying for new streets and sewer services.

The barracks were located in Milwaukee Alderman Ted Stude's 9th Aldermanic District. In April 1973, he established a Disciplinary Barracks Advisory Task Force to recommend a land use plan. In October 1973, Stude submitted its report to Milwaukee Department of City Development Commissioner Edward Hayes.

The report stated that the plan must "be compatible with 1975 Air Quality Standards Procedures set by the State of Wisconsin and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency," and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

The purpose of the act was to establish a "national policy that will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment" and to "enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation." According to the task force, the site was "a rare opportunity to reverse the trend which has left our city almost completely barren of small wildlife habitats."

Although senior housing and a community center had been contemplated,

the task force recommended that 200 acres "remain under the public domain, basically undeveloped except for environmental education, recreation, flood control and the preservation and protection of open-green area."

The report pointed out the site's environmental attributes and that they serve to "contribute to the environmental stability of this entire northwest part of the city and must be maintained."

Stude recommended the task force continue to work out details of the plan.

The land that would become Havenwoods had been called the Army Disciplinary Barracks, but in October 1974, Stude announced a contest to rename it.

The contest was open to students ages 12 to 18 living in Stude's aldermanic district. The winner would receive a framed City of Milwaukee resolution, \$50 savings bond and opportunity to participate in a sign raising ceremony at the site.

The winner was Lisbeth Sealy, a 16-year-old Custer High School junior. On Dec. 20, Sealy took part in a dedication and sign raising ceremony. She was photographed with other dignitaries under a sign that read: Havenwoods City of Milwaukee Environmental and Recreational Area.

The city developed more plans for shaping Havenwoods. As authorized by Milwaukee Common Council Resolution 75-2299A, it signed an agreement with the University of Wisconsin Environmental Awareness Center to prepare a development plan for Havenwoods.

In his introduction to the 271-page development plan, Environmental Center Director Philip Lewis, called for creating the

Havenwoods Environmental Awareness Center as, "a multi-functional institution emphasizing the integration of public recreation with education, research and conservation activities."

Lewis believed the center could serve as a global awareness network for a Human and Environmental Rights Exposition, much like the Spokane Washington Fair and a proposed Tennessee Energy Fair.

The plan included a display mall where groups could stage exhibits and outdoor concerts. The mall would extend from the parking area to the east side of an abandoned missile silo. The plan recommended a tunnel could link and extend the mall to the silo, suggesting the silos be investigated as protected display areas.

The administration and orientation center would have six movie theatres to provide information on energy, air, water, land, populations and habitat. The plan went on to suggest that a "people mover" circle the building and that visitors would be "transported through time" learning how natural resources evolved.

The people mover would review words of philosophers from the past, such as Thomas Jefferson, Muir and Leopold. Other features would include an energy awareness hall and lounge and restaurant serving food grown on-site.

The ambitious plan went on to envision workshops focusing on recycling, food produc-



NORTHEAST MILWAUKEE ADVERTISER-PRESS

**Custer High School student Lisbeth Sealy won a contest sponsored by a Milwaukee alderman to rename the United States Disciplinary Barracks site.**



DONOHUE ENGINEERS-ARCHITECTS

**An artist's rendering submitted as part of the design competition to build the Havenwoods Environmental Awareness Center.**



MARCUS SMITH

**Emrah Turkan, 2, and Azra Turkan, 4, inspect a tent at the 2015 Havenwoods Harvest Fest. The tent was one of several displays.**

tion, gardening, a legal workshop, and a bathing workshop, where users could choose from “sauna baths, hot and cold baths, showers, whirlpool baths and steam baths.” The workshop would communicate “cleanliness concepts” and provide a venue for bathing equipment manufacturers to demonstrate their products.

According to Havenwoods Conservation Biologist Beth Mittermaier, over the years, “there were several competing plans and task forces. There were also several ‘problems’ including funding, land ownership and changing attitudes” regarding land use.

“This land could have been anything,” she adds. “It could have been divided into parcels and sold and resold, but that didn’t happen. People looked at all the choices available. They thought about tax bases, and low-income housing, an incinerator, limited funding and all kinds of things, and they chose nature.”

In 1978, city officials realized that developing and maintaining the site required more resources than they could muster. In April 1978, Natural Resources Board members toured the site and four months later the board approved plans for a study to determine if the state should acquire Havenwoods.

Wisconsin Gov. Martin Schreiber appeared before the Natural Resources Board in August 1978 to recommend that Havenwoods be established as Wisconsin’s “first nature and wildlife pre-

serve in an urban area.”

Two months later, the city and county passed resolutions for lands owned by the city and MATC to be transferred to the Department of Natural Resources.

DNR Secretary Anthony Earl established the Havenwoods Ad Hoc Advisory Committee in September 1979 to develop a master plan for the site. The committee held a series of meetings from September 1979 to March 1980. Upon release of \$20,000 from the State Building Commission for engineering and planning, a Conceptual Master Plan was developed for Havenwoods.

The 1979-81 state budget established the Havenwoods Forest Preserve and Nature Center and in 1981, David Weizenicker, DNR Parks and Recreation bureau director, submitted the Havenwoods Forest Preserve and Nature Center Master Plan to DNR Secretary C.D. “Buzz” Besadny.

Construction began in the summer of 1985. The Havenwoods Forest Preserve and Nature Center opened its doors in June 1986.

#### **Making the connection**

Today, when speaking with dog walkers, hikers or children attending the Havenwoods Harvest Fest — many of whom are not aware that they are standing on the site of a former corrections facility — it’s impossible to overstate how much neighbors and visitors appreciate Havenwoods and its location.

Klippel believes Havenwoods “is not the sort of place you think of when you think of a state park. You think of a place with beautiful old trees and sandy beaches. But this is a little neighborhood park sandwiched between houses. Still, Havenwoods is a place where kids touch a snake, a turtle or a toad for the first time in their lives and are absolutely delighted by it.

“We want to help kids make that connection with nature and understand they’re part of it,” Klippel adds. “These are kids who may be our future state park users out in the rest of the state. They are the future supporters, and we need to help people understand they depend on nature; that they’re connected to nature.”



*Marcus Smith is a public affairs manager for the Department of Natural Resources. He would like to thank the following people who helped with this story: Judy Klippel, Beth Mittermaier and the staff at Havenwoods; and the staff of the Frank P. Zeidler Humanities Room at the Central Branch of the Milwaukee Public Library.*



#### **WELCOME!**



DNR FILE

- **Havenwoods State Forest is open year-round from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. The nature center is open weekdays from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. It is closed on holidays.**
- **Directions: Havenwoods State Forest is on the north side of Milwaukee, one block west of Sherman Boulevard on Douglas Avenue. From West Silver Spring Drive, turn north onto North Sherman Boulevard. At the second stoplight, turn left (west) on Douglas Avenue. After one short block, you will be at the Havenwoods entrance. Continue up the hill to the parking lot and nature center.**
- **A vehicle admission sticker is not required at Havenwoods.**
- **For more information visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword “Havenwoods.”**
- **If you’re interested in programs, trail information, or want to volunteer, call 414-527-0232.**