Instead of having an ugly drainage basin collecting water from the new highway, which was proposed by the Arizona Department of Transportation, community planners in Gilbert, Ariz., decided to make the most of the 16 acres by creating Cosmo Dog Park.

The idea-to-development task was assigned to Tami Ryall, assistant town manager. “The land was free, and we did our design before the freeway design,” she explains. “So we saved money by having the park excavated when the freeway was excavated.” System development fees then paid for the features and improvements, such as trees, landscaping and restrooms.

Putting Your Heart Into It

“We tried very hard to create a park with a lot of heart,” says Ryall. “Our memorial feature includes bricks that people purchased at cost. Over 1,100 bricks were bought in six months, which shows how important it is for pet owners to commemorate their pets, whether a current dog or one they had as a child.” The bricks were sold for $20 each, covering their cost and the engraving. The funds raised by selling the bricks literally allowed the memorial feature to pay for itself.

The memorial area isn’t only for local folks to have a place to commemorate their pets. “The memorial includes bricks for canine officers from local and Phoenix valley law-enforcement units as well as ones from our law-enforcement counterparts in Holland, who assist us with our dogs,” Ryall adds.
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The law-enforcement canine bricks are in a different color, and are grouped together.

In the memorial area, a bit of whimsy was added in the form of a giant-sized dog water bowl complete with a retired fire hydrant as the centerpiece. Plenty of seating is available in the area for dog owners to take a break and converse.

The dog park is even named after a dog—Cosmo, Gilbert’s first police canine officer. Cosmo’s gunmetal-grey granite monument looks out over the nearby lake, and the story of Cosmo is used to explain the lesson of bravery and community service to school children.

**Doggie Paddling**

The large man-made lake features a running dock from where dogs can jump into the water after a well-thrown Frisbee. “We were surprised that this was one of the most popular features of the park,” Ryall says. The lake also serves as a training site for Phoenix-area police officers to teach their canine partners to jump into water and practice maneuvers they might be called upon to do while on duty.

The playground includes agility equipment used both for leisure and canine cops-in-training. “The canine officers learn how to jump through a window by passing through a block structure with a hole in the middle,” she adds. “Agility skills are practiced on the catwalks and climbing equipment; the fear of confined spaces is overcome by practicing passing through a tunnel.”

For less rambunctious dogs, the lake area is surrounded by a beach. Dog owners don’t need to be fearful of the dirty wet-dog smell or muddy paws, since there are two dog-washing stations to clean their precious pooches before heading home via car or trail.

**On The Trail**

“We integrated the dog park into the trail system so you can access it if you are walking your dog to the park from the extensive trail system,” Ryall notes. “We installed a pedestrian bridge over the freeway for people to be able to gain access from the communities on the other side of the highway.”

Dog owners have plenty of places to sit and chat at the pavilions, tables or benches. The pavilions are available for rent, and are used for everything from corporate events to birthday parties. Additional amenities include basketball courts and a playground with swings, a jungle gym, a tire swing and a spider-web climber with coated cables.

“We designed everything to be fun, colorful and playful,” says Ryall. “The design’s theme colors are all vivid dog-toy colors. It is energetic, bright and happy.”

A fire hydrant feeds a giant water fountain for drinking water for thirsty pooches.
Innovative Design

Riprap is the standard choice when selecting a method of slowing down drainage water, but in the case of this dog park, it wouldn’t do. Instead, a series of stair-like steps was used in place of the riprap, allowing an otherwise ugly area to be given new life as an amphitheater. Imprints of dog paw prints trailing every which way along the structure added a bit of playfulness that warmed up the cold concrete feature.

The Lay Of The Land

Since Cosmo Dog Park is also for people, there is plenty of seating, shade and places to socialize. The park is lighted, which allows it to be open from 5:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. And, dog owners that prefer to bring their own dog watering bowl have access to a spigot.

For the four-legged users, the park has four fenced areas. “We have separate fenced areas for active dogs and the smaller or timid dogs,” says Ryall.

“Grassy areas will only survive if you select a variety of tough grasses that can withstand the constant pounding,” Ryall explains. “And, the fencing should look like normal fencing and not a prison system.” The fencing at Cosmo is 4 feet high.

The entrance/exit area is also double-gated, which helps dog owners to keep their pets under control and make an easy transition into or out of the park. “Don’t shortchange on the gates or latches. Make sure you use self-closing gates and latches,” says Ryall. “There are a lot of little escape artists out there.”

Over 1,100 commemorative bricks were sold in six months, allowing the memorial to pay for itself.
Grand Beginnings

Over 5,000 people attended the grand opening in 2006. “The canine officers were the rock stars,” Ryall notes. “People could get autographed pictures of the canine officers.” An old-style carnival attraction with a new twist proved to be one of the most popular activities of the day—it was a large photo-board of the canine officer in uniform, but with an opening at the face, so dog owners could get a photo of their dog’s face with the physique of the canine officer.

“The community was so engaged. We really touched on a heartstring, and the park has resonated with people,” says Ryall. “We’re a very family-oriented community; our pets are such a part of the community, and people love their children and their dogs.”

Cosmo Dog Park has won multiple awards and continually proves that a dog park can be more than just a fenced area for dogs to run free—it can be a fun place for a community to come together. PRB

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