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Horseshoe Pits Added to Bradenton Recreation Center

By Jeff Shain, Daily Sun Senior Writer
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Joe Clouse, left, and Bill Hoge, both of the Village of Hillsborough, enjoy playing on the new horseshoe pits at Bradenton Recreation Center.

George Horsford, Daily Sun

Even for a friendly neighborhood contest, the logistics can get unwieldy with too many people around just one horseshoe pit.

“For a couple of years, we’d be trying to run maybe a dozen people through one pit,” said Joe Clouse, who gets together with his Village of Hillsborough neighbors for regular gatherings. “It took quite a while to do a round-robin.”

Things should move faster starting this week, with the debut of two new pits at Bradenton Recreation Center. Finishing touches came Monday, and Clouse came out Tuesday with friends to ring in the additions.

“They moved right along,” Clouse said.

The pits are located near Bradenton’s pickleball courts, adjacent to a trio of existing corn toss courts.

“Both are tossing games, so it makes a nice complement,” said Matt Armstrong, facilities director for The Villages Recreation & Parks. “We were able to add two pits to make it work.”

Clouse and about two dozen neighbors submitted a formal request a little more than a year ago, noting that the single pit at the Hillsborough Recreation Center was getting more use than it could handle.

“They were (asking), can we get anything south of (State Road) 466A where we can go play?” said Armstrong. “We’re always open to adding something new. This was definitely a resident request.”

Said Clouse: “Why not ask? Maybe there’s something we can do to move it along.”

Though horseshoes is available at other locales in The Villages, more of those pits are found in the northern sectors.

“The nearest ones are 3 or 4 miles away,” he said. “We wanted to get something local if we could.

“It’s just a fun thing for ourselves,” he continued. “The only real organized (pits) I know of is up at (Paradise Recreation Center). They’re serious; they’ve got guys that go around and do competitions. We’re just doing it for fun.”

Manatee Recreation Center got the first look, Armstrong said, but there wasn’t a suitable piece of flat turf.

“There was space,” he said, “but an amount of work would be needed on the land itself. A lot of it depends on slope, because we’re dealing with water runoff areas and drainage areas. And we want to make sure it’s close enough to the equipment shed.”

Bradenton, just a mile away, proved to be a better fit. The project was approved last year, though it was briefly set aside amid COVID-19 restrictions.

“The big thing is it’s not a forgotten project,” Armstrong said. “Once we were able to get back in again, we were able to get that project to completion.”

Armstrong noted that as corn toss has grown in popularity over the years, that amenity is seen more in the south. So while horseshoes has a new southern venue, they’re looking to add corn toss in more northern spots.

“Corn toss wasn’t around when El Santiago and Chula Vista were being built,” he said. “Hopefully we’ll be able to add corn toss to a couple of places where they have horseshoe pits.”

Meanwhile, Clouse and his friends can start organizing around a new venue. “Now we can start planning brackets or whatever it might be,” he said.

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