Big and Little Bear Lake Project

Gaby Rodriguez, a seasoned staff member of the Parks Team, is a volunteer with the Lakes Management Unit Services (LMIS), a division of the Lake County Health Department. He is enrolled in the Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP) and working towards his Park Maintenance II Certification. Gaby has volunteered to do baseline water quality sampling in Century Park’s Big and Little Bear Lakes. To qualify, a lake must be at least 6 acres in size and samplings must occur monthly, May-September, near the deepest area of the lakes.

The water is analyzed for nutrients, solids, temperature, dissolved oxygen, clarity, and plant species. The LMIS has determined the three coordinates where Gaby is to perform his samplings. Twice per month, Gaby goes by boat to the sample areas, completes a report, and submits his findings. Further, summary reports are presented to the concerned parties the following spring with an analysis of the data collected, a list of threats, and recommendations on how to reduce or eliminate the problems.

The quality of the lakes, especially the shoreline and water quality, are detrimental to the health of the plant and marine life as well as recreational activities to its residents. The goal of the program is to maintain or improve water quality, promote healthy and safe conditions, and protect ecological diversity.

Gaby is also an avid fisherman! Through his findings in the Century Park Lakes, he has become aware that the north end of the lakes does not have enough protected areas for fish habitat breeding or plant life. He has assembled fish structures, all made from man-made materials including plastic pvc, composite wood, and cemented buckets, in different sizes and shapes to create a playground for the fish. The fish structures will be lowered into the lake, by boat, and placed in groups where the water level is 3-4 feet above the tallest part of the structure. Gaby’s goal is to build 60 fish structures by this fall. James Schubert, another member of the Parks Team, will map out where the structures are placed using a GIS system.

Gaby’s future projects include building fish cribs out of pallets and man-made materials. The cribs will be put on the bottom of the lakes that will offer smaller fish protection from the larger fish.

Gaby has been an employee of the Vernon Hills Park District for 19 years. He is married, with two children. His daughter is a recent college graduate and his son is a senior in high school. Gaby hopes to spend more time on the lakes in Wisconsin and Illinois and enjoy his favorite pastime – bass fishing!