



ANDY ARENZ/The Times-News

Above, boat rides to Pillar Falls, along with food and a formal ceremony, marked the dedication of the riverfront park north of Twin Falls. Below are Jack and Marinette Jordan, who say the Centennial Waterfront Park opens up a 'canyonful' of memories for them.

A day in the park

Centennial Park dedication brings back memories of 'spring rituals'

By Phil Sahn
Times-News writer

TWIN FALLS — A trip up the Snake River to Pillar Falls washed up a few memories for some Twin Falls County residents Saturday morning.

Hunting, fishing, hiking, swimming, just scrambling around — the kinds of things that come natural in a place like the Snake River Canyon.

"One of our spring rituals was to sneak across the bridge to the Blue Lakes and take our first swim of the year," Jack Jordan of Filer recalled.

"There might even have been a little snow on the ground — it was so cold," he said.

But not so cold that a group of 12-year-olds wouldn't give it a try.

Jordan, his wife Marinette and others rode

a tour boat from Centennial Waterfront Park to the falls as part of the festivities for the park's Saturday dedication.

The river's calm, green waters, birds darting among the cliffs, the Perrine Bridge far overhead, the wide canyon itself seemed to open up the memories as the boat pushed up river.

Jordan, who was born in Twin Falls but moved to Filer in the early 1940s, hunted duck in the canyon and hiked the winding trails along the bluffs. He and his friends used to shoot at pigeons from the rim above Pillar Falls, but Jordan didn't recall hitting a lot of the birds.

One spring, however, he and a friend caught 72 bass near the Blue Lakes Country Club.

Jordan recalled families living in the

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canyon whose kids climbed risky trails to catch the school bus. Kids also used to climb on the girders beneath the original Perrine Bridge, something Jordan said he never dared do.

He saw some interesting spectacles from that bridge.

"I was there when they threw the tollhouse over it," he said.

When the toll was taken off the bridge in the 1930s a group of happy citizens pushed the house into the canyon to celebrate. But the tollhouse wasn't the only refuse to go over the rim.

Twin Falls City Councilman Art Frantz, also on the boat ride, remembered a Fourth of July celebration in the 1930s when people pushed several cars into the canyon.

These days, of course, throwing stuff off the bridge or canyon rim is against the law. But shopping carts dumped on the canyon sides show that some people still can't resist the temptation.

Saturday's excursion was Jordan's first to the canyon bottom in about 20 years.

Until Twin Falls County received access to the land for the park, people had to trespass to the canyon bottom. But the Centennial Waterfront Park opens up a calm stretch of water and a large chunk of the canyon to residents of Twin Falls and the Magic Valley.

The master of ceremonies at

Saturday's dedication, Lee Wagner, called the park "a work in progress." The description seemed apt.

With plans for hiking trails up and down river, and a green area yet to be fashioned on seven acres that the Twin Falls Rotary Club bought and donated to the county, the park remains far from finished.

Darrell Heider, who heads the Twin Falls County Parks and Recreation Department, said the park was a long-held dream of the parks and recreation board.

"This could have been a housing development," he said.

But local landowner Joe McCollum gave the county a right-of-way to cross his land to the park.

The Idaho Fish and Game Department gave \$13,000 to improve the road and the state Parks and Recreation Department awarded a \$65,000 Waterways Improvement Fund grant to build the park. Money from the fund comes out of gasoline taxes paid by boaters.

The Bureau of Land Management leased the county ground and BLM spokesman Tom Dyer credited Heider for hours of work to get the park built. The rotary club raised money to buy the land and on Saturday rotary President Ron Belliston handed the deed to Heider.

"If it hadn't been for them, this might not be a reality," Heider said.

The community steering group and

parks and waterways boards that helped fashion a park plan deserves credit too, Heider said.

Representatives from most of these groups spoke Saturday, underscoring the cooperation in building the park.

It included forming the steering group after a furor arose about letting motorboats on the park waters. The Twin Falls County Commission finally adopted rules that incorporated suggestions from the citizens group and the parks and waterways commissions.

"This park is a shining example of what partnership, private and public partnership, brings together," said Kent Just of the Greater Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce.

Saturday, two boats ferried people from the park boat docks, about a mile down river from the Perrine Bridge, to Pillar Falls. The 1000 Springs Tours of Hagerman provided the boats.

The rotary club sold hamburgers, hot dogs and soft drinks with the money going back to the park. Canoeists demonstrated their craft and took people for rides.

The waters were calm and golden autumn leaves reflected on the river from trees along shore. After stepping off the tour boat, Jack Jordan said the park was a fine idea.

"It makes me want to get a small fishing boat and come back down here," he said.