Gotz & Stropes Landscape Architects Inc. begins Mackle Park facelift
Wednesday, August 6, 2003

By SEAN ENNST, Staff Writer

Naples landscape architect Eliot Gotz was in Fort Lauderdale on Saturday to accept an award for her firm's design of a park within Mediterra, a gated community in North Naples.

For the next six months, Gotz will see what she can do for Marco Island's Mackle Park.

Her firm, Goetz & Stropes Landscape Architects Inc., began work this week on a major renovation plan for the city's largest park.

Gotz says she wants Mackle Park to command the same kind of presence as Parque Cestalest in Naples, a park that received the award from the Florida chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

"I would see Mackle Park as a centerpiece for Marco Island," Gotz said last week. "And I think it's there, but it just has to be articulated. And that's what this process will do.

But unlike the design process for Parque Cestalest - a private park - the redoing of the public Mackle Park will allow residents to offer their ideas for the professionals to consider.

The first of three planned public meetings on the project by Goetz & Stropes consultant team of architects, engineers and designers will likely take place in either late August or early September.

Gotz added she looks forward to learning residents' "dreams for what Mackle Park can be because residents know better than anyone else what the park needs.

"In a public park, it's different because you're engaging the public," she said. "When you're working on a private thing, it's maybe six people working together. (This project) will be much more complicated in that regard. But it's also much more engaging.

Two weeks ago, the Marco City Council awarded Goetz & Stropes a $59,200 contract to develop the park's master renovation plan. The first stage of the process requires the firm to analyze and present all current park elements, including topography, drainage, soils, vegetation, lighting, buildings and paving, according to the contract proposal. Naples-based Coastal Engineering Consultants Inc., a member of the Goetz team, will also provide input on soil and topographic survey.

Once the team has assessed the park's strengths and weaknesses, Gotz said, it can start generating and collecting ideas about how to exploit the strengths and improve the weaknesses.

One weakness is the finger-shaped extension of the lake at the park's east entrance. The park's master plan designer told her she wanted to find that section in that of the lake to make the land more useful.

Perhaps the park's greatest strength, Gotz said, is its vast open space - land that hasn't been designated for a single purpose. Some parks are all ball fields, for instance, and thus exclude most of the population, she said.

"This park is very democratic and probably will continue to be, although I'm not going to predict that," Gotz said. "I think it's been built upon and there's still so much opportunity in looking at the needs of Marco Island and how this park can be developed to take it in that direction."

The first meeting will function as a workshop of ideas, Gotz said. At the second meeting, her team will present residents with design options and general cost estimates to implement each option.

At the third meeting, the team will present a final design, cost estimate and complete study for the city to consider.

"We'll go through an explanation of the park and what we see as the opportunities, and then certainly open it up for discussion," Gotz said of the first public meeting. "Because there are different parks through the planning process, the kickoff meeting format will be very different from the other meetings."

Goetz & Stropes designed its first park, River Park Community Center, for the city of Naples. The park was completed last year for a total cost of $350,000. Park Cestalest, designed for Mediterranean developer The Bonita Bay Group, was completed last year for $450,000.

Parque Cestalest has an astrological theme and is the first of six themed parks within Mediterrana.

Among the park's distinctive elements are a labyrinth, designed for people to meditate as they walk along a path; a stargazing pavilion, in which people can bring telescopes; plants that change with the seasons; and a spot for a human sundial.

The Florida chapter of the ASLA recognized the park over the weekend with an Award of Excellence - signifying "an exceptional, unique and innovative solution that goes beyond achieving its purpose" - in the Open Space category.

Gotz and Jerry Stropes, who became business partners two years ago, also worked on the streetscape revitalization of Fifth Avenue South in downtown Naples in 1996, when the two were with another firm, J. Roland Lieber Landscape Architects.

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- Ellis Goetz, Co-founder, Goetz & Stropes Landscape Architects Inc.

While Fifth Street South and Mackle Park are two completely different projects, Gotz said, she hopes the planning process for Mackle Park goes as well as it did for Fifth Street South.

"The last thing we want is a plan that doesn't get implemented," she said. "We want a plan that's doable, feasible, workable - a good plan that will get implemented, just like Fifth Avenue. This park, because of its size and its location, is able to serve the needs of the whole community. Marco Island is still a very nice, wonderful, small community, and probably will stay that way. This park can do that for them."