

# Goetz & Stropes Landscape Architects Inc. begins Mackle Park facelift

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By SEAN ERNST, Staff Writer

Naples landscape architect Ellin Goetz 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, Goetz 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 master renovation plan for the city's largest park.

Goetz says she wants Mackle Park to command the same kind of presence as Parque Celestial, the 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," Goetz 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 Celestial — a private park — the redesign process for the public Mackle Park will allow residents to offer their own ideas for the professionals to consider. The first of three planned public meetings with the Goetz & Stropes consultant team of architects, designers and engineers will likely take place in either late August or early September, Goetz said.

Goetz added she looks forward to learning residents' "dreams for Mackle Park," 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 \$59,500 contract to develop the park's master renovation plan. The first stage of the process requires the firm to describe and analyze 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 an updated boundary and topographic survey.

Once the team has assessed the park's strengths and weaknesses, Goetz 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 north end, she said. The team may want to fill in that section of the lake to make the land more useful.

Perhaps the park's greatest strength, Goetz said, is its vast open space — land that hasn't been designated for any 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," Goetz said. "It hasn't all been built upon yet, so there's great flexibility in looking at the needs of Marco and how this park can be developed to take it in that direction."

The first meeting will function as a workshop of ideas, Goetz 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," Goetz said of the first public meeting. "Because there are different benchmarks 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. Parque Celestial, designed for Mediterra developer The Bonita Bay Group, was completed last year for \$450,000.

Parque Celestial has an astrological theme and is the first of six themed parks within Mediterra.

Among the park's distinctive elements are a labyrinth, designed for people to meditate as they walk along the 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.

Goetz 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.

While Fifth Street South and Mackle Park are two completely different projects, Goetz 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 is still a very nice, wonderful, small community, and probably will stay that way. This park can do that for them."



Parque Celestial, the first neighborhood park at Mediterra, the community being developed by The Bonita Bay Group of North Naples, features celestial design influences such as the zodiac terrace shown in the foreground, the interactive sun clock to the right and the stargazing pavilion in the background. Submitted photo



A St. Patrick's Day parade proceeds down Fifth Avenue South in downtown Naples in 2001. Ellin Goetz and Jerry Stropes helped with the revitalization of Fifth Avenue South in 1996 while working for J. Roland Lieber Landscape Architects. Submitted photo

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— Ellin Goetz, Co-owner, Goetz & Stropes Landscape Architects Inc.