Ohio Mutual Partners With Local Park District on Innovative Conservation Project

BUCYRUS, OH – In cooperation with the Crawford Park District, Ohio Mutual Insurance Group has begun a two-year project to convert a visible area of the company’s main campus from turf grass to native prairie flora.

The Ohio Mutual Prairie Preserve was originally conceived when Ohio Mutual expanded its home office facility in 2001. As part of that construction project, and in order to help control seasonal flooding in the immediate area, the company created a water retention lake in the front of its campus to hold water run-off during times of unusually wet weather. Plans at that time called for the lakebed to eventually be seeded as a prairie – using only plants native to the area.

“This project reflects two corporate values of Ohio Mutual – leadership and partnership,” said Ohio Mutual President & CEO Jim Kennedy. “We hope that the Ohio Mutual Prairie Preserve becomes a catalyst and template for other area corporate citizens interested in collaborating with local organizations to create landscaping that reflects the natural beauty of this region.”

Late last week, as part of a two-step process that will extend into the fall, licensed park district personnel applied an EPA-approved herbicide to the turf grass currently in the lake bed in order to create a pristine area of soil. This area, once cleared of all current plant life, will be seeded in the fall of 2011 (winter temperatures will assist seed germination) by park district volunteers with a custom-created blend of seeds that will eventually create an ecosystem that closely mimics the prairie flora and fauna discovered by the area’s original settlers hundreds of years ago.

Creation of the prairie will not interfere with the location’s function as an occasional short-term reservoir for floodwater.

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When fully mature, the area will feature a perpetual landscape of colorful native plants – along with a number of butterfly and bird species attracted to these plants. While Ohio Mutual is funding the project, volunteers coordinated through the Crawford Park District will assist with the creation and on-going maintenance of the area.

“Since the location of this prairie is on the most-visible part of our property, many residents and visitors to Bucyrus will be able to share in the natural beauty and biodiversity of this unique project for many years to come,” stated Stan Eusey, Ohio Mutual Facilities Manager and long-time park district volunteer. Eusey has been a leading supporter and advocate for the Ohio Mutual Prairie Preserve within both organizations.

“I believe Ohio Mutual’s vision and commitment to this prairie project will open up additional opportunities for public-corporate partnerships in the region, resulting in a strengthened community commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability,” added Crawford Park District Director Bill Fisher. “We hope this is the first of many similar projects throughout Crawford County.”

The Crawford Park District is an organization jointly funded through local government funds and donations, and governed by three volunteer park commissioners appointed by the Crawford County Probate Court. District personnel and volunteers maintain five parks, and bikeways and walking paths throughout the county. The Friends of the Crawford Park District, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit volunteer organization that gathers resources to support the mission, facilities, and activities of the park district. Additional information is available at www.crawfordparkdistrict.org.

Ohio Mutual Insurance Group was founded in 1901 and has been based in Bucyrus since 1909. It offers property and casualty insurance products in six states through a network of nearly 400 independent insurance agents. Additional information is available at www.omig.com.

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*Editor’s note:* Photos embedded in the release are courtesy of the Crawford Park District, and illustrate several of the plant and animal species planned for the Ohio Mutual Prairie Preserve.