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Columbus' Recreation and Parks Department commissioned artists to build fairy houses for trees in five city parks. Kenny Cramer's Enchanted Castle is in Schiller Park.

Artists' fairy houses in parks ignite visions of fantasy lands

By Devan Filchak
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Last year, there were elf doors. Now, some Columbus-area artists have built small treehouses in five Columbus parks for children and families to find.

The city's Recreation and Parks Department commissioned the artists to build the fairy houses for "Find Me in the Park." The treehouses went up last week in Goodale, Schiller, Westgate, Whetstone and Wolfe parks and are to remain until Sept. 20.

"I think it was a great collaborative experience between corporations and parks and then the arts community. You can't think of a better symbiotic thing going on," said Sharon Dorsey, an artist who built the treehouse in Westgate Park.

Fifth Third Bank is a sponsor of the project, and maps locating the houses are available at any of its offices or at the parks department's website, columbus.gov/RecreationandParks.

Each artist was paid \$1,000 to create an installation and pay for any needed repairs.

Some designed a house to reflect the surrounding neighborhood. Kenny Cramer, one of the artists, consulted with Friends of Schiller Park before building a castle-themed house there.

Dorsey's treehouse in Westgate Park reflects a back story about a genetic researcher who created "squirrdinals," a hybrid of cardinals and squir-



Daric Gill's Living Orb is in Goodale Park. Gill said he has seen children creating their own stories for the fairy treehouse.

On the Web

► See a video about the treehouses at Dispatch.com/videos.

rels. After the researcher's home burnt down, the squirrdinals flew to parks to take shelter.

Daric Gill said he could see that children and adults were creating their own stories for his treehouse as he built it in Goodale Park.

"I found that their imaginations were far more creative than if I started to inject what I thought was in there," Gill said. "I've gotten spaceships from it. I've gotten elf houses. I've gotten little worlds, cosmic worlds."

The parks department had a similar project last summer. Artists created tiny doors at

the base of trees. Jean Winters, development administrator for the parks system, said children left letters by the doors describing their thoughts about the fairies. This year, Winters said, the children can put their letters about the houses in containers the department will put beside the trees holding the houses.

"Growing up as an artistic kid, you aren't necessarily the most popular kid on the playground sometimes," Cramer said. "I had my own imaginary land. I had the land of Fairical that I would play in my backyard for hours and hours. ... It was my escape. Creating something like this, which is certainly inspired by that element, is really bringing Fairical to life."

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