



Above, a rendering of an alley in Ludington. The redevelopment would transform it into an activated urban space to be used for community functions. At left, plans for Eastern Ave. in Alger Heights aim to create more space for outdoor dining, music, activities.

EXPERT

Who's behind our parks?

Landscape designer blends love of the outdoors with affinity for architecture

BY PASHA SHIPP

While you might not know Mark Vysoky personally, you're surely familiar with his work. Vysoky's resume includes such greenspaces as Thornapple Riverbend and Millennium Parks. We had a chat with him to learn more about his passion for connecting people to the natural world.

GR Mag: Grand Rapids Magazine: Tell me about your background in landscape architecture; how did you get into it? *Mark Vysoky: As a child I always had a love for building architecture. With my creativity and love for design, I had my heart set on being an architect. As I got into high school, I went through an assessment of my strengths and interests, and landscape architecture was one of the five professions that surfaced through the Q&A evaluation. I had no idea the profession existed prior to the guidance office's evaluation. It seemed to capture my love for architecture as well as my love for the outdoors. I visited several landscape architectural design firms and that confirmed my decision to study landscape architecture in college.*

GR Mag: You knew what you were going to study – what did you do next? *MV: I studied landscape architecture at Ohio State University. It was a program that was within the College of Engineering and the School of Architecture. This 5-year degree covered a variety of classes rooted in engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, and environmental sciences.*

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Mark Vysoky



GR Mag: Let's get down to the details. What's the most important thing to consider when beginning a new landscape architecture project? *MV: There is a lot that determines what the most important factors are to consider from project conception. Generally, you need to consider the site and the overall context of the project vision. Our municipal government agencies and higher education centers, for example, have planning ordinances and design guidelines that govern land development. They provide a framework to prevent the least amount of impact on our waterways and create healthy outcomes for all people and environments. Landscape architects evaluate the strengths and limitations of a site to help achieve sustainable outcomes. When we plan and design outdoor spaces, we aim to achieve a balance between our human desires and our natural environments.*

GR Mag: From there, how do you come up with your design solutions? *MV: Landscape architecture starts with an understanding of people and place. Our development should reflect a thorough understanding of human interaction with each other and should create places that function in harmony with our surroundings. This delicate balance is what we strive for in design. When coming up with designs for a project, we must first understand basic elements such as soils, slope, vegetation, and drainage patterns. These all impact our design and are the foundations from which we can create successful engineered design solutions that are in harmony with each other. As architects plan and design indoor spaces, landscape architects plan and design outdoor spaces. We want our design to emit a sense of place, leave memorable human impressions, and minimize environmental impact. **GR***