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UF Student Helps Out City Park

In Lakeland for an internship, he donated \$1,000 to Common Ground.

By [Ryan Little](#)

LEDGER CORRESPONDENT

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LAKELAND | Craig Hardwick thought Lakeland was just an exit off the interstate before the University of Florida student got a summer internship here.

And then he discovered Common Ground Park.

Hardwick found common ground in Lakeland thanks to a local Summer Leadership Program, donating \$1,000.44 to the city-owned Common Ground Park.

"I was always brought up to give back to your community," Hardwick said. "Lakeland was great to me and I just felt like giving something back."

"To me growing up, Lakeland was just an exit off I-4 between Tampa and Orlando," he said. "It ended up being a whole lot more than I had expected. It turned out there was a great city there I had no idea about."

Pam Page, assistant director of parks and recreation for the city, said "we were incredibly touched that a young kid would make such a large donation."

"It is just so wonderful that the program is intended to give back to the youth, but it's so great to have the youth give back to the community."

Hardwick, a senior at UF who lives in Orlando, came to Lakeland for a summer internship with Lockheed Martin. He worked mostly as an auditor, where his main project was compiling audit resources for the company, he said. It was after accepting the internship in April that he received an e-mail from a mentor at Lockheed regarding a Summer Leadership Program in Lakeland, an eight-week program for interns and new hires working in the Lakeland area.

The Summer Leadership Program, created by the Lakeland Economic Development Council in 2008, sent him on trips to Southern Wine and Spirits, where he learned about the distribution systems and logistics of moving 100,000 cases of product a day; a full tour of downtown Lakeland, and a tour of the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings at Florida Southern College.

On June 4, the group visited Common Ground Park at the city's tennis courts on Edgewood Drive.

Hardwick learned first hand from Bill Tinsley, director of parks and recreation for Lakeland, about the city's newest park, even participating in some quality assurance



Aaron Daye / *The Gainesville Sun*

Craig Hardwick, who recently made a \$1,000 donation to the city of Lakeland for Common Ground Park, is seen here outside the Warrington School of Business at the University of Florida.



testing with other program participants.

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"The parks that I always were exposed to were just really average," he said. "But coming here to Common Ground, there were all sorts of new, all-inclusive playground equipment that encouraged kids to play together and work together. It just seemed like a really cool place to go as a kid. If I had lived in Lakeland as a kid, I would have wanted to go there a lot."

Hardwick's check for \$1,000.44 has a special meaning: Tinsley had told him to drop off the check and save the 44 cents the stamp would cost.

"So I added 44 cents to the donation to use the savings in a more giving way," Hardwick said.

Page said the donation will go to the park's perpetual care fund, created to generate interest large enough to pay to maintain the park. Hardwick's donation brought the fund to just under \$40,000, but it needs at least \$1 million to begin covering the costs, and eventually \$3 million to cover maintenance.

Hardwick plans on graduating with a bachelor's degree in finance in spring 2010, after which he will pursue his masters in finance, hoping to graduate in spring 2011.

Will he come back to Lakeland when he finishes?

"I can't give a definite answer on that; I'm exploring all my opportunities," he said. "But a year ago, Lakeland wasn't on my map. Given the company and the community, it definitely is now."

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