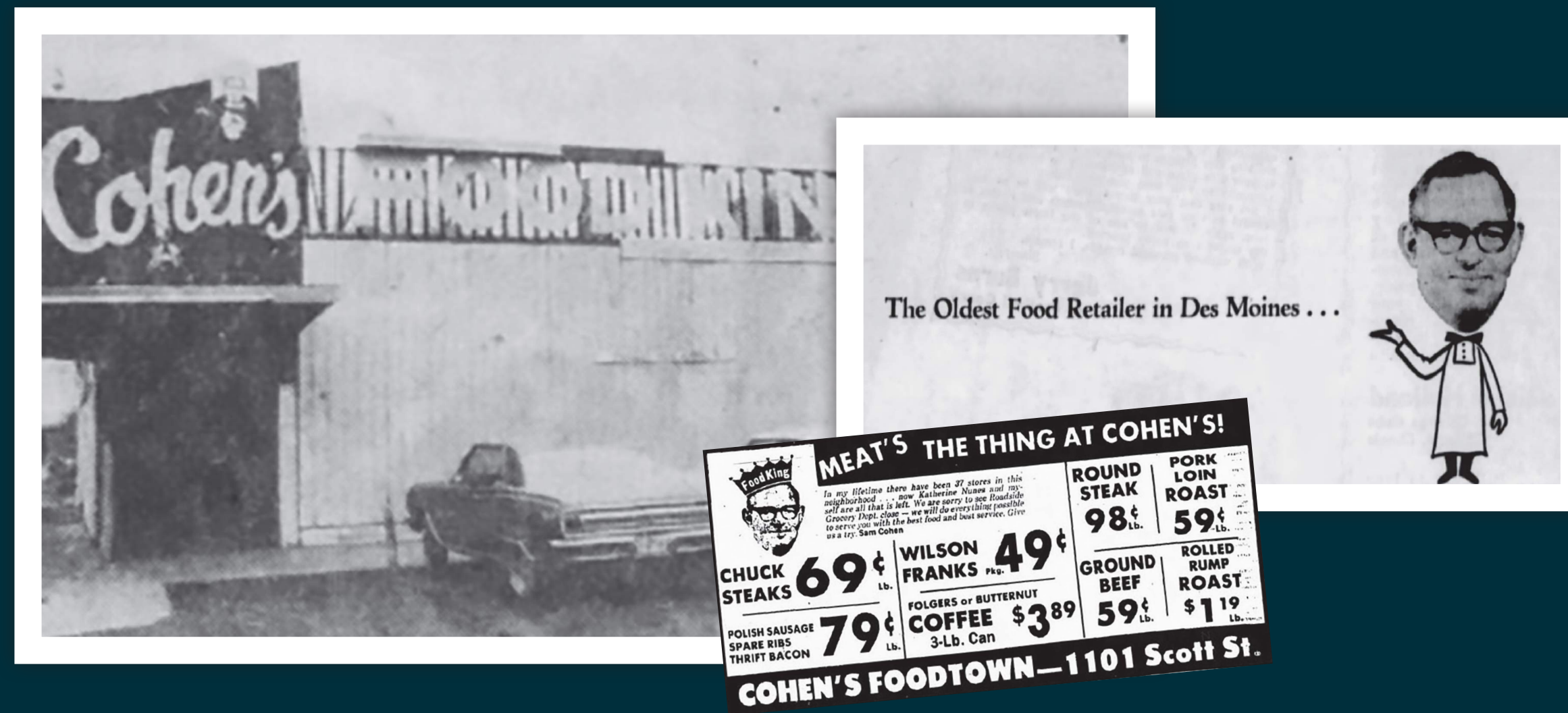


# SAM COHEN: A QUIET DO-GOODER

## ABOUT SAM COHEN

Sam Cohen was born in 1910 and started working at his father's grocery store on Scott Avenue and SE 11th Street when he was 10. Telephones weren't widespread yet, so he went door to door taking orders and then delivering them by horse and buggy. He worked alongside his father Hyman Cohen learning what it meant to be a good neighbor and a good businessman.



## A FRIEND TO THE COMMUNITY

Almost no business or organization within his reach was left untouched—Sam's generosity was felt in churches and community centers, at backyard picnics and funerals for dear friends. Sam lived his life to help others. He preferred to be a quiet do-gooder, helping when it was needed without fanfare or fuss. People said that everyone in the neighborhood owed him something, but Sam never collected on the debts.

He greeted his customers as friends, a big smile behind the cigar in his familiar white shirt and white apron. Sam took excellent care of his employees and praised their role in his success.

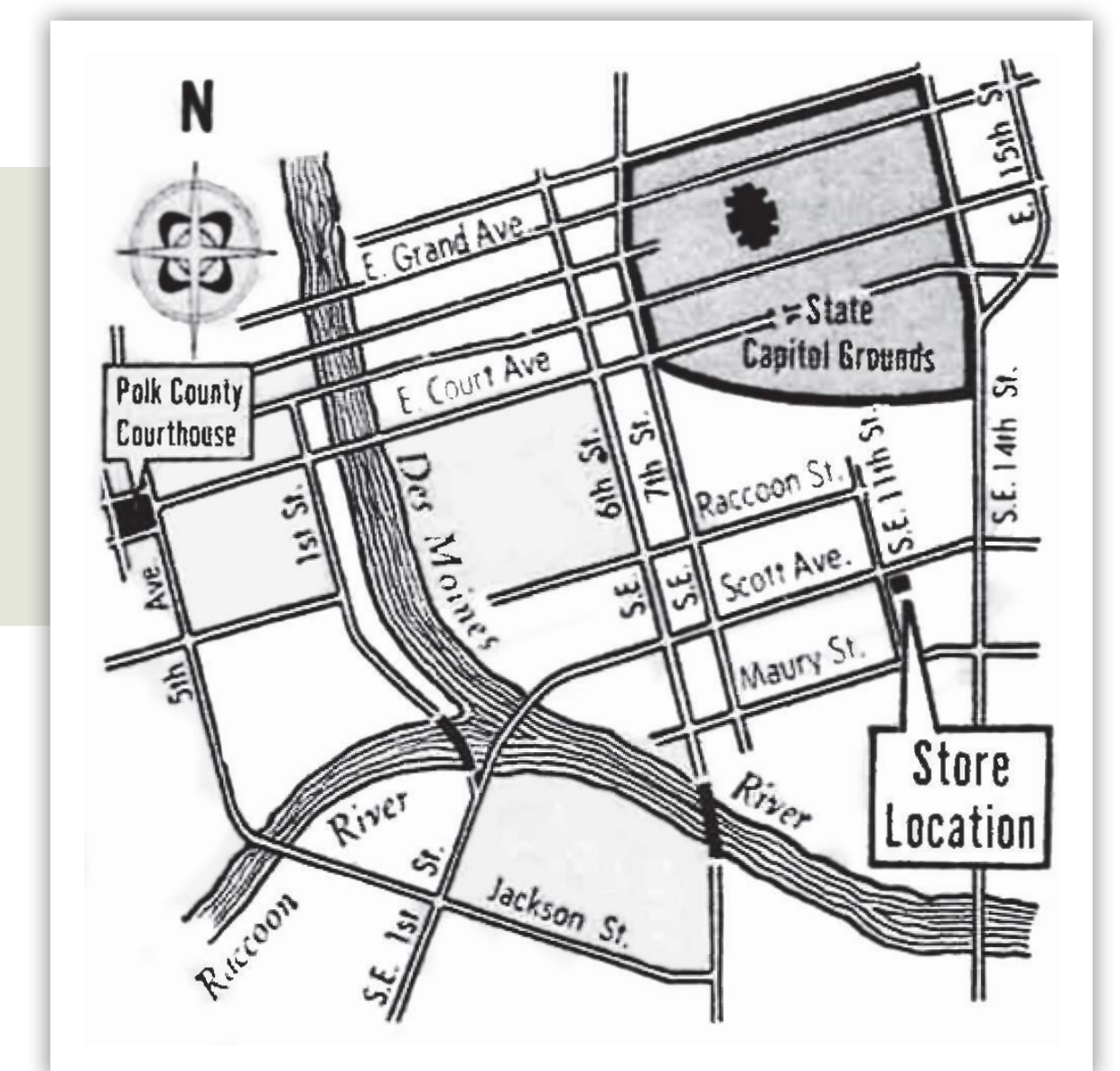
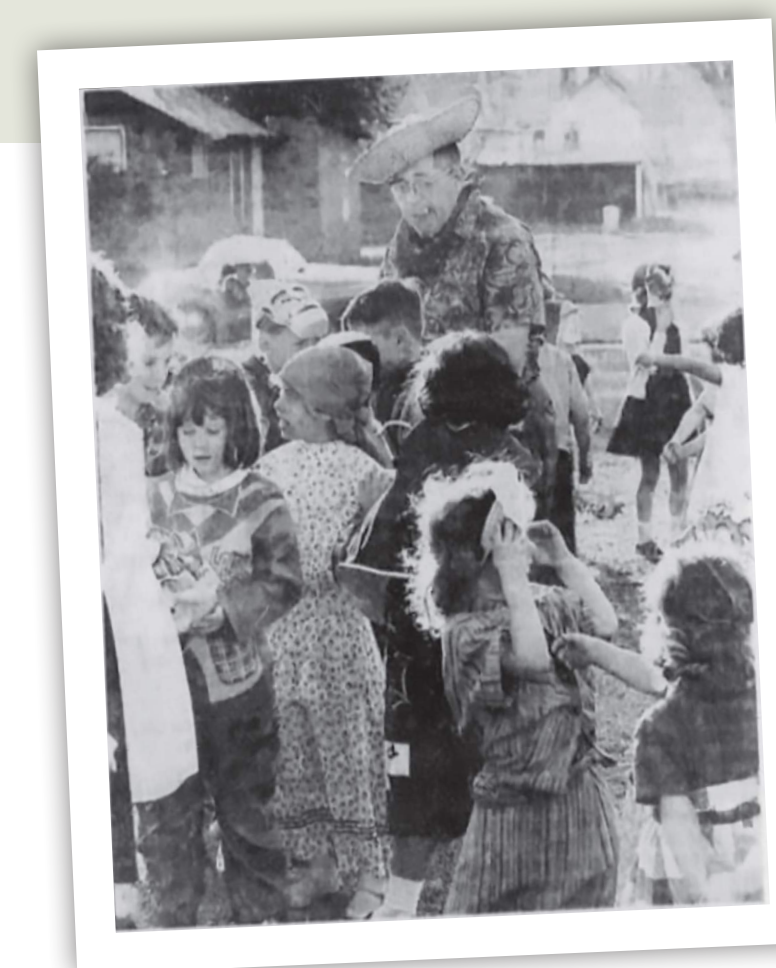
This park was dedicated in his memory on July 12, 1981. A large neighborhood crowd gathered on a very hot day to honor and remember the kindness of their beloved Mr. Sam.



Sam Cohen's father, Hyman Cohen, pictured in front of H. Cohen Food Market in the 1920s with Mrs. Cohen on the left and daughter, Ann.

Sam took over Cohen's Foodtown in the 1940s and poured his heart into the business until he died in 1978. By all accounts, he loved the people in this neighborhood deeply. He was always delivering food to this friend or that neighbor who needed some encouragement or support.

Sam held an annual Halloween party for the local kids and always remembered their birthdays.



Map of area from 1974.

For more history on Des Moines' Parks visit [dmparks.org](http://dmparks.org)

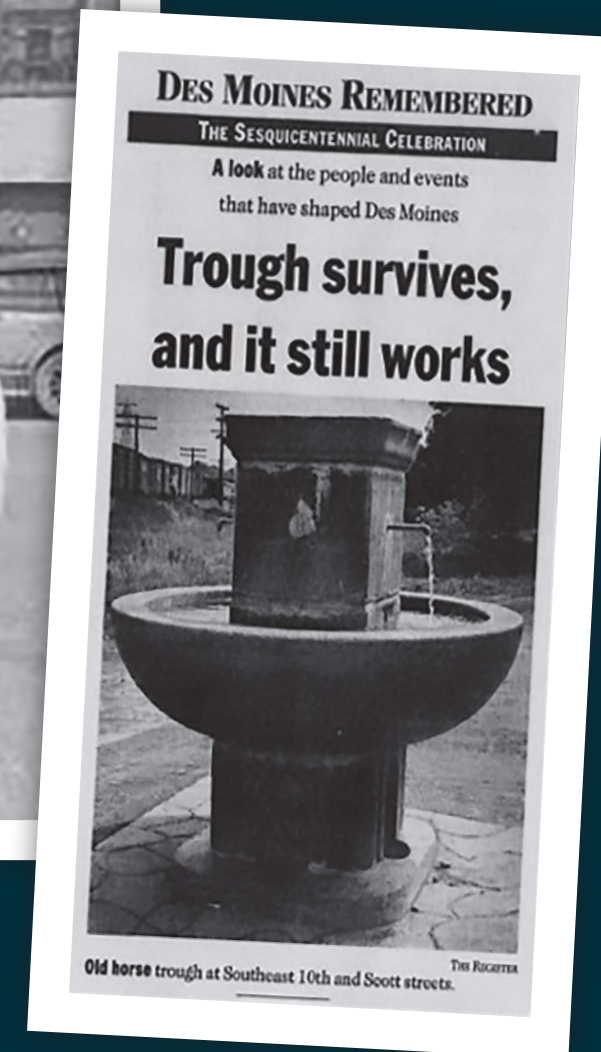
Photos courtesy of Des Moines Register



# HISTORIC GIFT POURS INTO NEIGHBORHOOD

## A GENEROUS AND USEFUL GIFT

The water fountain in this park might seem out of place, but when it was gifted to the city and situated in Cohen Park in 1915, it was a boon to the residents of the Southeast Bottoms, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Des Moines. The city received the fountain as a gift from Hermon Lee Ensign, a generous and wealthy man and “a friend of the horse, of the dog, and of humanity.” He died young and left most of his fortune to build animal drinking fountains for any city in the country that wanted one. A total of 125 fountain were made of solid Maine granite, with bowls that measured six feet across.



## PRESERVING HISTORY

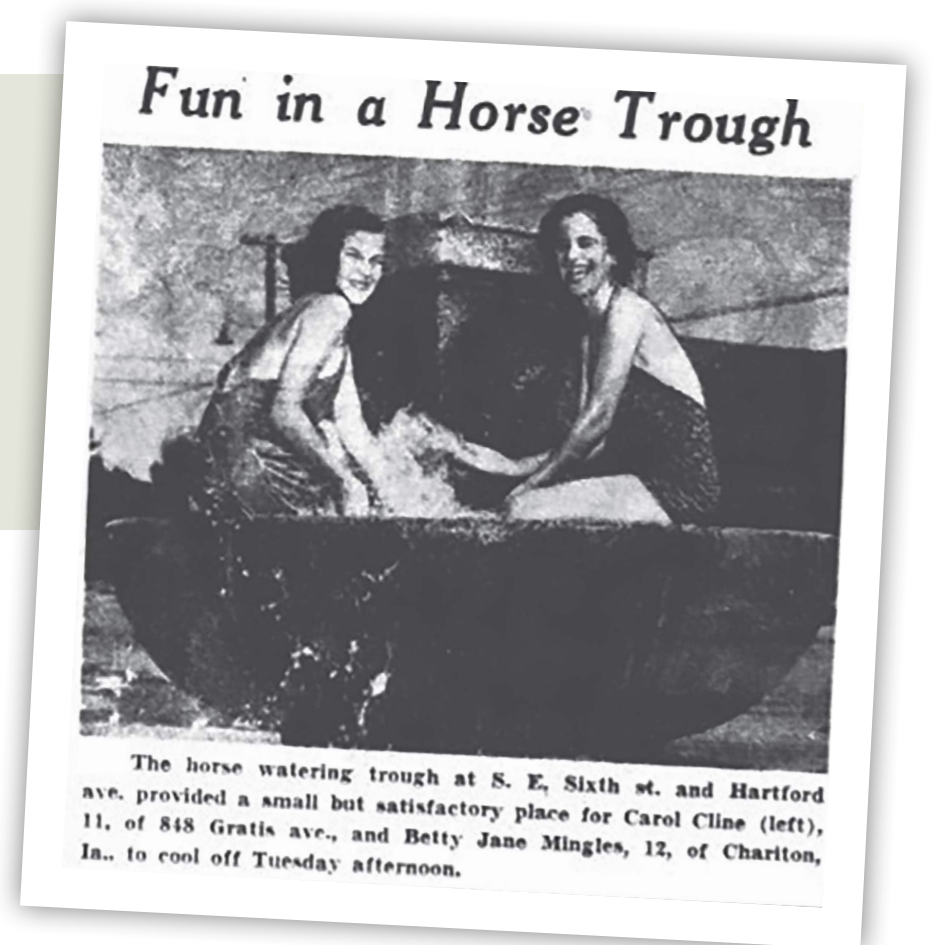
In 1976, the Southeast Water Trough was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1977, the City of Des Moines created a small park to preserve the fountain and the grounds around it. The fountain itself was cleaned and repaired and serves as the centerpiece of the park. It still runs year-round today, providing a cool drink in the summer heat and the winter chill.



Only a handful of the original 125 fountains are still working, which makes this one even more special.

The fountain was a watering hole for horses and small animals. But this fountain is unique—it was fitted with a special spigot so that residents without indoor plumbing could use it to collect fresh water. At one point, more than 1,000 people relied on this fountain for their water.

The fountain became a community gathering place, a shared experience that gave local folks a chance to catch up and check in.



For more history on Des Moines' Parks visit [dmparks.org](http://dmparks.org)  
Photos courtesy of Des Moines Register



# A PLACE FOR THE COMMUNITY

## HONORING A GIFT

This park was established in 1977 as a way to protect the historic water fountain located here. After its arrival, the fountain served as a trough to many thirsty horses and small animals, but it was also used extensively by neighborhood residents who did not have running water in their homes.

As horses disappeared from the streets and the automobile took over, the fountain became a popular place to wash cars. When the Southeast Water Trough was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, the City of Des Moines knew it needed to do something to preserve the fountain and the grounds around it. But there was also an opportunity to create a safe, beautiful, welcoming space for residents of the Southeast Bottoms to gather.

The city purchased a small piece of land from the Chicago Northwestern Railway Company to create this park in 1977. The park was intended to protect the historic water fountain but it also became a gathering place for the community. In 1981, the park was dedicated as Sam Cohen Park to honor the neighborhood shop owner.



**1903** Polish immigrant Hyman Cohen opens the H. Cohen Food Market

**1906** Fountain donated to the city by Hermon Lee Ensign



**1915** Fountain relocated to Des Moines' Southeast Bottoms near E. 10th and Scott Street

**1920** Sam Cohen starts working with his father at age 10



**1940** Sam Cohen becomes partner in ownership of Cohen's Foodtown with his father Hyman Cohen

**1961** Fire guts Cohen's Foods and the community rallies to help Sam reopen



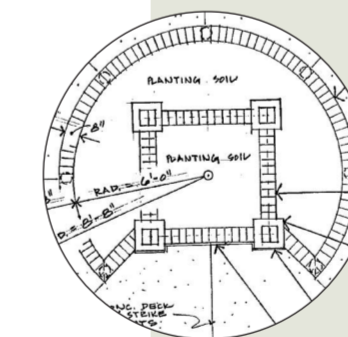
**1976** Southeast Water Trough is entered into the National Register of Historic Places

**1977** Mini Fountain Park proposed as part of the Neighborhood Development Comprehensive Plan



**1978** Beloved Cohen's Foods owner Sam Cohen dies

**1981** Sam Cohen Park dedicated and Winterset Monument Company refurbishes the fountain for free



**1983** Memorial flower planter dedicated in honor of Elizabeth Yaw, who loved her community and left part of her estate to improve the S.E. Neighborhood

**2020** Stormwater detention basin installed



**2022** Sam Cohen Park is renovated to add spaces that make the park more welcoming and family-friendly

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Photos courtesy of Des Moines Register