

Chehalis: An Oasis of FUN!

Myriad kids' activities promise good times during spring and summer breaks

Story and photos by Tracy Beard

It's never too early to begin planning for spring and summer breaks for the kids. I recently discovered a hidden gem this week after speaking with a local Longview mom, Brittany Thomas. She and her husband actively participate in their children's lives and continuously search for fabulous "out and about" places. Brittany told me about Penny Playground, Shaw Aquatic Center, The Chet & Henrietta Rhodes Spray Park, and Dairy Dans Drive-In. My husband Steve and I drove up to Chehalis to check it out. Wow, this place was not around when my kids were little, but I can't wait for grandkids so I can share these unique places with them.

Penny Playground – open all year - Recreation Park, SW William Ave

In the 1950s, Gail Shaw and his wife Carolyn recognized the community's need to improve Chehalis. Gail determined that an over-the-top park and an outdoor community pool would fill that need. Penny Playground, with its wooden structures and a pea gravel surface, was finally completed in 1993.

Playgrounds have always provided a hub for people to gather and have fun. After more than 25 years, the newly remodeled playground reopened in May 2021. The new design incorporates an ADA-accessible play area with an all-weather play surface. This playground is equipped



with: tall towers, numerous climbing elements, zip lines, swings with molded bucket seats, an array of slides, wheelchair-accessible toys, a unique elevated hillside, a walking path, seating, LED lighting, shaded areas, and good visibility to watch children at play. An attractive but functional fence encloses the park for the safety of the children.

Dairy Dan Drive-In, 1582 S Market Blvd.

Dairy Dan is just two blocks from Penny Playground and the perfect stop for a burger or hot dog, soft serve ice cream cone, or one of their tasty shakes that come in more than 40 different flavors. The current owners believe that Dairy Dan has been around since the 1950s, although it is tough to gather the facts since business licenses back in the day were less strict. The owner's son said, "Basically, back then, you could just put out a sign for burgers and sell them in the parking lot without a problem." Today, Dairy Dan is a popular dining spot and fully licensed.

Shaw Aquatic Center – open in the summer - 401 SW Parkland Drive

Since 1959, thousands of kids over multiple generations have enjoyed swimming in the Outdoor Community Pool. In 2014, the Chehalis Foundation did a \$2.2 million renovation. In August 2014, the new Shaw Aquatics Center opened, featuring slides, water toys, and a beach-entry-style pool. Fencing surrounds the entire pool area, including a grassy space with shaded picnic tables. Swim lessons are available in the morning and evening. Open swim time in the summer costs approximately \$5 per person, and Chehalis residents can purchase a season pass.

Chet & Henrietta Rhodes Spray Park – open in the summer - 401 SW Parkland Drive

In 2007, the Chehalis Foundation took on another project and built the Chet & Henrietta Rhodes Spray Park. The spray park is ideal for the little ones, but grownups can also have fun dodging water from the jets. The spray park is free and open from 9 am to 8 pm, weather permitting.



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By Tracy Beard
PROVISIONS
 ALONG THE TRAIL

Springtime is still cold in the Pacific Northwest. Make this delicious soup, take the fixings for the sandwich, and enjoy them with the kids at Penny Playground.

Tracy's Cheese Tortellini Soup with Garden Herbs

- 3 Tbl. olive oil
- 2 cloves chopped garlic
- 3 chopped ripe tomatoes
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 Tbl. chopped fresh parsley
- 1 Tbl. chopped fresh thyme
- 1 Tbl. chopped fresh basil
- 1 Tbl. chopped fresh oregano
- 1 Tbl. chopped fresh rosemary
- ¼ tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
- ⅛ tsp. dried sage
- 2 tsp. sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 1/2-lb. fresh or frozen cheese tortellini
- 2 cups fresh spinach
- Fresh grated Parmesan cheese

Heat two tablespoons of oil with the garlic in a soup pot. Do not let the garlic brown. Add tomatoes, tomato sauce, herbs, sugar, and broth. In another pot, bring 6 cups of water to a boil. Add the tortellini and cook until al dente. Drain and set aside. Toss tortellini with one tablespoon of olive oil.

After the soup has cooked for 30 minutes, add the tortellini and spinach. Cook for 1 minute and serve sprinkled with Parmesan cheese.

Bring the hot soup to the park in a thermos or in your RoadPro RPSL-350 12 V 1.5 Quart Slow Cooker.

Tracy's Artichoke Sandwich

- 3 x 4-inch piece of focaccia bread, homemade (see below) or store bought
- 2 thick slices Prosciutto
- 1 large slice fresh mozzarella cheese
- 6 quartered, marinated artichoke hearts

Slice the focaccia bread through the middle, leaving you with a top and bottom piece. Place the marinated artichoke hearts on the bottom, top with cheese, and then prosciutto folded to fit. Replace the top slice. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap to flatten the sandwich a bit. Enjoy with the tortellini soup.

Homemade Rosemary Focaccia Bread

- 2 cups warm (100°) water
- 1 heaping tsp active dry yeast
- 4 to 4-½ cups bread flour
- 2-½ tsp. kosher salt
- or 1-½ tsp. table salt
- ½ Tbl. chopped fresh rosemary
- Extra virgin olive oil

Put warm water in a mixing bowl and sprinkle the yeast over the top. After 3 to 5 minutes, stir in 2 cups of flour. Stir approximately 100 times until smooth, cover with plastic wrap and leave in a warm place for 1 hour (this is the sponge).

Sprinkle salt over the sponge and stir in ¼ cup olive oil. Add 1-½ cups more flour. Stir. Turn the dough out onto the floured surface. Add flour until you have a smooth, cohesive, and slightly sticky ball. Rub a large bowl with oil and place the dough ball inside. Turn the ball over to coat it with oil. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise 1 hour.

Punch down dough. Press down into a 12 x 17 rectangular cookie sheet making the thickness as even as possible. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 400°. Dimple all over the top of the bread with your fingertip making indentations. Brush or drizzle the surface with 3 tablespoons olive oil and top with rosemary, then dust with a light sprinkling of coarse kosher salt. Bake on the upper rack for 20 minutes rotating the pan halfway through baking. Let cool, and then cut into strips.

You cannot take it to the park, but after a long day outdoors with the kids come home and make yourself one of my favorite classic cocktails, Tracy's Sidecar.

Tracy's Sidecar

- 2 coupe glasses
- Lemon wedge
- Sugar
- 3 ounces Cognac
- 3 ounces Cointreau
- 1-½ ounces sweet and sour
- 1-½ ounces fresh lemon juice

Run the lemon wedge around the coupe glass rims. Dip both into sugar. Add all liquid ingredients to a cocktail shaker and fill it with ice. Shake for 20-30 seconds and strain into glasses.

