Beech Bend Park exhibit opens at WKU

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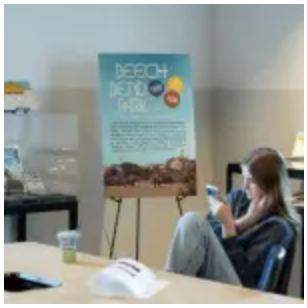
Photographs, flyers, ride tickets and other memorabilia sit on display in cases in the WKU Libraries' Special Collections Library's newest exhibit, "Beech Bend Park: Then & Now," in The Commons at Helm Library History Room on Thursday, March 12, 2026. The exhibit, which aims to tell the history and local importance of the park, will be on display through early June. (Grace McDowell / The Daily News)




Welcome
COUNTY-DAY
GUEST











In the early 1900s, 10 cents granted entry to a recreation area tucked in a bend of the Barren River northeast of Bowling Green. That beech tree-covered site, boasting picnic grounds, a dance pavilion, roller rink and restaurant, became the first iteration of today's Beech Bend Amusement Park. Then, in 1942 — straight out of the Great Depression — an entrepreneuring Charles Garvin purchased the land and devoted his and his family's lives to the park's success.

On Tuesday, the Western Kentucky University Libraries' Special Collections Library announced an exhibit exploring the eras of Beech Bend Park.

It's the latest exhibit of The Commons at Helm Library, where the Special Collections Library has relocated archives and displays over the past couple years — and it's the space's most hyperlocal exhibit on Bowling Green and Warren County so far, according to Andrew Adler, chair of the Department of Library Collections and Discovery.

It's open to all, while also designed to bolster the connection between Western students and the local community. Many students from outside Warren County may be unfamiliar with the city's offerings — and the curator, WKU Special Collections' Exhibits Coordinator Emma Newton, hopes the park will encourage students to explore the surrounding community.

Newton also hopes students engage with the primary sources within WKU Special Collections, a department that digitizes, contextualizes and features myriad ephemera to document regional history — which the exhibit features.

"Thanks to the dedication of Emma and others, it highlights a unique piece of local history while expanding awareness and access to our Special Collections," Adler stated.

"We want to be sure we're helping tell the story of WKU and the region as fully as we can because we definitely see that preserving history and making it accessible to a larger group is vitally important to help us understand who we are and where we came from."

Exhibit ephemera

There's the 10-cent park ticket, effective one century ago; photographs of the families who made Beech Bend Park possible; historical posters, postcards, promotional flyers, brochures and myriad other items — much, documenting Garvin's additions from rides to games to racing to swimming, activities accessible for additional fees.

"For years, hardscrabble Garvin admired the Brashears' easy income and dreamed of increasing profits under his own command," an exhibit caption states. "Garvin achieved this dream through his Depression-era money management, inhuman work ethic, and personal brand of business genius."

The exhibit — an effort that spanned more than a year for Newton — uses the items to show how.

Adler pointed to one standout — photos of a woman buried alive in a casket for 339 hours, connected to the outside world with a phone and 10-inch metal pipe for air and food. More than 5,000 came to watch, according to a newspaper account.

"I hope visitors learn from Charles Garvin's story that they can achieve any goal they set their minds to so long as they have perseverance, creative thinking and a willingness to work hard," Newton added.

It's anticipated to remain up until at least early June. As the exhibit is uninstalled, the Special Collections Library will take pictures of the material to create an online version of it, Adler said.