



# Marana Makes a Splash

Town History Celebrated  
Through Themed Splash Pad  
Landscape Architecture by EPS Group

Farming and ranching were once a way of life in the town of Marana. Settled in the late 1910s by farmers planting cotton, the area lured families toward the banks of the Santa Cruz River with its fertile soil and reliable, sometimes turbulent, source of water.

However, that changed in 2000, with the completion of the Santa Cruz levee. No longer at the mercy of unpredictable flooding, thousands of acres were suddenly made available for development. With its population expected to nearly double to more than 80,000 in the next 20 years, Marana is taking steps to provide its residents the necessary infrastructure and amenities afforded to cities like nearby Tucson.

With the recent surge in growth, town officials recognize the need for Marana to embrace, if not preserve, its agricultural roots. Though farming is no longer the dominant economic driver, there

has been a push to celebrate this culture in the area where it all began. Marana River Heritage Park was conceived from this aspiration.

Marana Heritage River Park's development is ongoing. The original park, a ball field and small playground, did not provide enough amenities to meet the interests of the neighboring young homeowners. So in 2012, the town commissioned the Master Concept Site Plan for an improved, much larger park. Development of the 112-acre strip of land would not only address Marana's culture and history, but also provide a range of recreational activities.

The Marana Town Council approved the design and construction of Marana Heritage River Park a year later. "It's going to be a park that reflects a much broader sense of where

our community came from," said former-town manager Gilbert Davidson. The town's vision for the new farm-themed splash pad was to create a destination where adults and children could spend time together, while celebrating Marana's agrarian history in a playful way.

The 4,500-square-foot splash pad combines inspired design with whimsical water toys. Landscape architecture and engineering firm, EPS Group, was instrumental in not only selecting the aquatic installations, but also in developing a master plan for the splash pad's themed sections. Individual areas are defined, and as children flow through the splash pad, they encounter a variety of farmstead experiences.

Marana's history unfolds like a story in both the layout and the play equipment selected for each themed experience. In close collaboration with Aqua Design International, EPS Group chose water toys from a portfolio provided by Vortex Aquatic Structures International. Horsehead water cannons, a spinning watermill, towering sunflowers, and a custom-built tractor provide the stimuli that fuel a child's imagination.

"We wanted the toys to not just be fun, but stimulating, too, for people of all ages" said Tom Snyder, EPS Group's director of landscape architecture. "Inclusivity was a consideration as well. The splash pad had to be accessible to young and old, and all levels of ability."

Above: In a concerted effort to preserve Marana, Arizona's fading agrarian history, the town purchased property formerly owned by Gladden Farms along the Santa Cruz River. The intent was to develop a park that would honor the community's past. With its farm-themed water toys set within distinct farmstead experiences, Marana Heritage River Park's new splash pad instantly became a popular regional attraction. A team led by EPS Group designed the 4,500-square-foot splash pad on 1.4 acres near an existing playground and ball fields.

Middle: Among the most popular splash pad features is the Horse Corral. Aspiring cowboys and cowgirls can rotate the colorful canons and shoot water at one another inside a fixed zone, without disrupting the play of other children around them.



Above: The windmill toy, with its spinning blades releasing constant streams of water, was originally going to be located under the canopy. Though the shade structure was designed tall enough to accommodate its height, water from the windmill splashed and collected on top of the canopy. In a seamless move, the water tower took its place.

The colorful rubber surfacing also plays into the overall design theme. Green and red striping represent the neat rows of a plowed field; a blue winding pathway signifies the Santa Cruz River, complete with a tunnel of water sprays children can run through.

The town of Marana wanted the splash pad to blend contextually with established components within Marana Heritage River Park. The custom tension fabric shade structure covering much of the pad is nearly identical to the one erected over the adjacent playground. It was designed large enough to provide relief to adults sitting along the splash pad perimeter as they watch their children frolic.

The restroom building contains the splash pad's pump house, where water is reclaimed and cleaned. The system has been designed with the ability to

recycle the water as well, which can then be used later for irrigation.

"Apart from adhering to the agrarian theme, we were given free rein in the splash pad's design," said Snyder. "As we worked with the town in developing a conceptual site layout, we realized the cost estimate for the design was nearly double than what had been budgeted. Rather than cutting features, however, the town was so excited about the project that they immediately began looking for additional funding. And I think it resulted in a big win for all – the town and its residents."

Town of Marana recreation coordinator, Kevin Goodrich, estimates the splash pad receives more than 17,000 visitors annually. "The facility holds organized events throughout the season, such as

school outings," he said. "We're especially proud of our Parks & Recreation Department's 'Sensory Splash' program, which we created exclusively for special-needs children."

Ecotourism has been an unforeseen benefit of the splash pad addition, and a pleasant one for Goodrich. "We've noticed many of the people coming to the splash pad travel here from cities throughout Southern Arizona. Whether they're visiting nearby friends or family, or it's the result of social media posts, we're delighted to host them."

While only a portion of Marana Heritage River Park has been developed to date, its future is filled with possibilities. The popular Santa Cruz Walking Trail runs parallel along

the length of the park, and plans include new retail, food, and event spaces. As more homes are constructed, and families continue to flock to this growing area, residents eagerly await Marana Heritage River Park's continued development.

Team List

- Landscape Architect* – EPS Group
- Splash Pad Aquatic Equipment* – Aqua Design International
- Civil Engineer* – EPS Group
- Architect* – DWL Architects + Planners
- Structural Engineer* – Caruso Turley Scott
- Electrical Engineer* – Electrical Design Associates
- Irrigation Design* – Coates Irrigation
- Owner* – Town of Marana, Parks & Recreation Dept.
- General Contractor* – Tri-Com Corporation

Top, Right: Here, under the relentless Arizona sun, splash pad visitors are weary of the summer heat. Always a welcome sight on a hot day, these ten-foot-tall, bright sunflowers rain down a refreshing spray on all who pass.

Bottom, Right: With a capacity for about 180 people, the Marana Heritage River Park splash pad provides countless hours of entertainment. Children can split their time between cooling off under sprays of water, and sweating it out on the adjacent playground. Covering about half of the splash pad's surface area, heavy-duty shade fabric stretched within a steel tensioned structure blocks up to 98.8% of harmful UV rays.