

The Visitacion Valley Greenway

— Jeanne Alexander

Established: 1999, Location: Leland Ave to Tioga Ave, Bus: #9 San Bruno; #56 Rutland; #15 Third, Contact: Fran Martin, 415-468 0639

Costanoan Indians were its earliest dwellers, but Franciscan friars made a wrong turn and named the valley. Traveling in a party of soldiers to San Francisco and lost in a heavy fog, they turned off the highway and when it cleared, they found a lovely valley. The discovery, on July 2, 1777, coincided with the Church's Feast of The Visitacion, so they christened it Visitacion Valley. It was a pasture for livestock from Mission Dolores and the Presidio until, as a Mexican land grant, in 1835 it was divided into parcels, and businesses started up. Residential development followed in 1905 when building sites could be purchased for \$125.00 – \$1.00 down and \$1.00 a week, but as late as the 1920s, the valley was still a pastoral outpost. Development over the next 50 years brought highways, low cost housing projects, immigrants from many countries, racial tensions, social problems and increased crime. The turnaround began when HUD (U.S. Dept. of Urban Development) demolished the projects and joined with City Hall and San Francisco State's Urban Institute to revitalize the area for the 24,628 residents of the diverse Italian, Latino, African American, Pacific Island and Asian community.

In the heart of Visitacion Valley, two women are turning a series of six publicly-owned vacant lots into a two-acre greenway. Opening on Leland Avenue's Hans Schiller Plaza in the business district, the Visitacion Valley Greenway winds up through the neighborhood to Tioga Avenue. "Three plots are basically finished, and three need capital improvement," says Fran Martin, co-founder with Anne Seeman, of Friends of Visitacion Valley Parks.

The Greenway Project crusade began in 1995. Working with the Trust for Public Land, they mounted an intensive lobbying campaign, speaking and gathering endorsements in the community, negotiating with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission which owned the land, and the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, to which it had to be transferred. Four years later the parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding stipulating that the infrastructure (pathways, irrigation and fencing) be completed by 2004 before RPD could take it over.

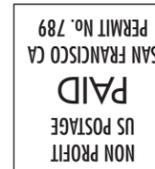


With funding from TPL and the Columbia Foundation in collaboration with VVGP, other grantors, and RPD, construction on Hans Schiller Plaza began in 2000. In March 2001 it opened. Behind the handsome steel gate, the walkway curves through the block where benches, grass, and mixed flower beds are bordered by walls inset with decorative broken tiles. The gate was designed by resident artist Jim Growden and the tiles by Fran Martin. The gates and tiles, along with pathways and fencing are recurring motifs to create visual unity throughout the Greenway. Trees surround the meadow in the Children's Play Garden, completed in 2004. A stunning panorama of city and water unfolds from the view bench at Campbell Street.

Recognition from the community has already begun. The Greenway received two San Francisco Beautiful Awards for Beautification for the Hans Schiller Plaza, the other for its role in design and construction of the RPD clubhouse. The Trust for Public Land has given its prestigious Lachman Soulage Award for leadership to Fran Martin and Anne Seeman.

However, the Greenway still awaits completion. Still under construction, the Agricultural Garden is missing vegetation and a gate at the top, plus some seating and trellises. The Herb Garden, Native Plant Garden and Community Garden are also incomplete. Unfortunately, RPD did not get the \$1 million state grant it applied for to complete these pieces, although Project Director Marvin Yee notes that there is \$1.1 million in Capital Fund for the native plant garden and he is considering beginning Phase One development.

"The Visitacion Valley Greenway is helping revitalize and beautify our long undeserved neighborhood," declares Fran. Her future planning includes an outdoor classroom that would partner with the California Academy of Science, other organizations, local schools and their after school programs. "The Greenway functions on many levels," she declares.



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Parks in the News

GO GLOBAL: NPC AT WORLD EXPO 2005



Neighborhood Parks Council recently co-hosted a booth at the World Expo in Aichi, Japan. Non-governmental organizations were invited to play a key role in the Expo for the first time this year; an entire pavilion was dedicated to the NGO Global Village. NPC teamed up with our Japanese counterpart, **GreenPal**, as well as Bay Area non-profits **Earth House** and **SAGE** to promote parks advocacy and sustainability. In addition to presenting NPC's work, we gleaned "best practices" of other organizations from around the world. The global event focused on the theme "Nature's Wisdom," with the intent of bringing people together in order to create a sustainable direction for humanity. Learn more online at www-1.expo2005.or.jp/en.

PARKSCAN SLATED TO GO NATIONAL

At the annual Parks Caucus this fall, leaders in the parks movement from Portland (**Linda Laviolette**), Chicago (**Erma Tranter**), Washington, D.C. (**Barry Goodinson**), and Philadelphia (**Lauren Bornfriend**) met in San Francisco to share best practices. Among the many program elements and take-aways, the leaders were particularly interested in ParkScan technology and exploring its applications in their home cities. ParkScan may soon be showing nation wide!

RENAISSANCE AT RPD

Mayor Newsom is taking a team approach to revitalizing the City's Recreation and Parks Department. Heading the squad is **Yomi Agunbiade**, now the permanent General Manager and former manager of RPD's Capital Division. The appointment, made in July, was just the beginning of a full-on RPD renaissance, as the Department welcomed **Denny Kern** as Chief Operating Officer and **Scott Reese**, new Superintendent of Neighborhood Services. Denny is the first COO in more than 30 years. Both have extensive professional backgrounds in parks and recreation. Next will be the appointment of a Superintendent of Citywide Services. We hope to see that appointment made this fall.



PARKS CONNECT: A NEW LEAF FOR MINI-PARKS

Project Parks Connect is an innovative collaboration among the Mayor's Office, RPD, NPC and friends of the parks groups that will recognize and support citizen stewardship in eleven of San Francisco's smaller parks. Established groups will help create annual work plans for each park, and sign up to provide needed assistance on tasks that existing RPD staff do not have time to accomplish. This shared responsibility for the care and maintenance of mini-parks will be adjusted each year as more gardener positions are (hopefully) added to RPD's ranks as the economy improves. The initial roll out of Parks Connect is scheduled to launch with a community workday at Koshland Park on Dec. 3.

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP WORKS: LAKE MERCED LANDS NEW GARDENERS, MASTER PLAN

District 7 Supervisor **Sean Elsbernd** and Lakewood Tenants Association president **Mona Cereghino** teamed up to ensure improvements of Lake Merced's perimeter, restoration of John Muir Drive and development of a master plan for the area. **Supervisor Elsbernd** responded to the community's goals and suggestions by reallocating money from the Public Utilities Commission to pay for three new permanent gardeners. This is a major victory, as four gardeners marks an all time high for the Lake.



RECOVERING FROM ARSON AT SUNSET

South Sunset Playground, at 40th and Vicente, was the target of an arson this fall. The playground is greatly missed by children and families who welcomed the recent renovation, completed in 2003.

This site is one of the 44 playgrounds throughout the city that the Recreation and Parks Department has refurbished in the last five years; more than 100 playgrounds are still in need of repairs and play structure replacements. Unfortunately, there are no funds to renovate most of these playgrounds in this budget cycle.



Supervisor Fiona Ma called on the community to activate its social and charitable networks to help rebuild the playground. Ma estimated the repair costs to be at least \$100,000. The **Mills Corporation** was the first community partner to respond, kicking off the refurbishment campaign with a \$5,000 donation. Thank you!

Neighborhood Parks Council will be serving as a fiscal sponsor, holding the repair donations. Community members who wish to donate, or suggest contacts for additional corporate sponsors or funding, should contact NPC at (415) 621-3260.

CITY SERVICE AUDIT FIRST YEAR REPORT

The first annual audit of park maintenance, according to the standards required in Prop C, is now posted on the city controller's website (http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/controller/csa/rpt_final.pdf). NPC believes that this report needs improvement. Our comments to this effect are listed online at www.sfnpc.org. The 2003 Prop C legislation includes a requirement for posting park work schedules (now available on the RPD website at <http://mission.sfgov.org/RPDPropC/>). RPD has advised that the schedules listed are not current, and the locations of gardeners and or custodians are subject to change for the following reasons: scheduled leave, staff meetings, training, and temporary re-assignment to cover emergencies. Schedules are expected to be updated to accurately reflect assignments as staff and technology upgrades continue. Comments regarding the schedules may be directed to Scott.Reese@sfgov.org

Blue Greenway: San Francisco's Next Waterfront Trail

— Isabel Wade

Can San Francisco match the wonderful addition of Chrissy Field on the north waterfront with an equally fabulous trail on the southeastern edge of the Bay?

This challenge has motivated a growing band of passionate open space and recreation advocates for more than a year. The vision for a greener waterfront and completion of the San Francisco portion of the Bay Trail emerged in 2003 from the Waterfront Symposium co-sponsored by SPUR and NPC.

Dubbed the "Blue Greenway" in recognition of the land/water interface, the objective is to realize a 13-mile waterfront trail and complete San Francisco's portion of the Bay Trail. The path would connect existing parks, spur new green space and needed recreation facilities, provide access to and from our closest wilderness, San Francisco Bay, and recognize and celebrate the diverse neighborhoods along the way with art and historic interpretation. To date, only a few small sections of the trail have been created along the corridor.

The Blue Greenway Steering Committee members are convinced that the southeast waterfront can provide a spectacular addition to our open space system for residents and visitors alike. The views from much of this edge of the city back toward downtown are breathtaking; the generally phenomenal weather is also a well-guarded secret of the Dogpatch, Bayview and Hunter's Point neighborhoods. An attractive trail along the relatively flat corridor would provide a much-needed opportunity for exercise in a quarter of town faced with serious health challenges. For this reason, Supervisor Sophie Maxwell is a strong proponent and an eloquent voice for the need to add usable green space in a district that is notably lacking in this amenity.

The importance of trails and more access to nature for San Francisco residents was documented recently in a 2004 study of recreation needs, prepared for the Recreation and Park Department by national consultant Leon Younger & Pros (available at: http://www.sfgov.org/site/recpark_index.asp). In the survey of 1,305 San Franciscan households, trails were identified as the number one need by respondents. What a boon for our city if we could help to meet this need with a 13-mile trail with some

of the most spectacular scenery in the world!

Fortunately, Mayor Newsom is inspired by both the vision of a greener San Francisco and the knowledge that open space development provides major economic incentives and benefits. To help get the project to the next level, the Mayor recently

established a Task Force with representatives of all city agencies that can assist the project as well as key stakeholder groups and Blue Greenway committee members. This is the kind of process undertaken in Oakland that has been establishing its own waterfront trail over the last nine years, including taxpayer support provided by the 2002 Measure DD.

Creating a 13-mile trail is a bold challenge; one that will undoubtedly take decades to complete and many millions of dollars to realize. Adding this swath of open space, however, could be at least as transformative to the southeast as the opening up of Chrissy Field has been to the north. Viewed as part of a larger system of greenways throughout the city, the Blue Greenway has the potential to provide even more value for the required substantial investment. The economic, environmental and health advantages of creating a pedestrian and bike-friendly network that enhances our access to nature, reduces the cost of storm water runoff and offers linkages that promote neighborhood connections and opportunities for healthy exercise will help to make San Francisco a showcase of sustainable city living.



Bayview Hill, Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, and Parcel E — Jeff Condit



Map detail: reineckandreineck.com