

In front of the clubhouse at Junipero Serra Playground, one toddler descends a pole and another surveys the climbing structure to the right.

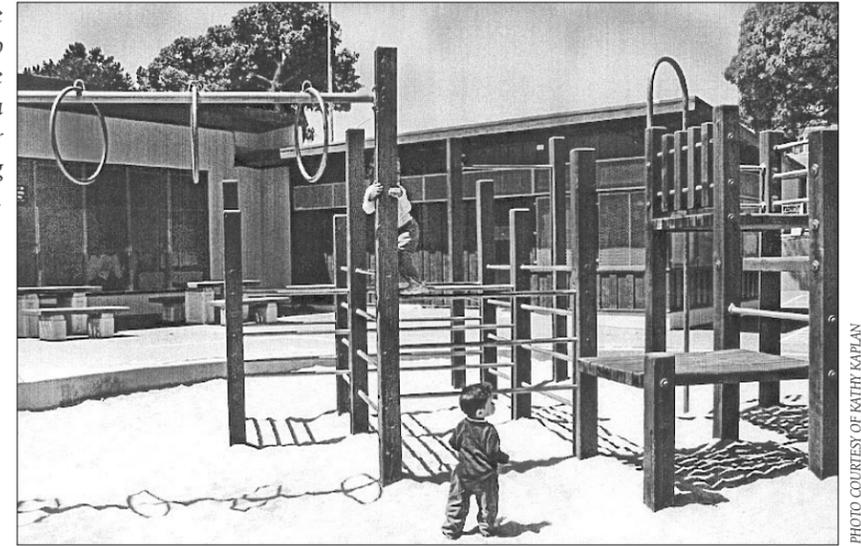


PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY KAPLAN

Junipero Serra Playground

January 18, 1955 was a good day for kids in the Lakeside District. Their first playground opened when Mayor Elmer Robinson completed the dedication. Set in the area bordered by 19th Avenue and Junipero Serra and Sloat Boulevards, Junipero Serra Playground was financed by the 1947 Recreation Bond Fund. The one-and-a-half-acre triangular plot, bought from the Stonecrest Corporation, was fitted out with a baseball field, tennis court, basketball court, slides, swings, sandbox, and a clubhouse. In the economy of the 1950s, the entire project, including purchase of the land, grading and construction, cost \$186,000. Time and exuberant use took their toll and in 1982, the Recreation and Park Department implemented an improvement plan that updated play areas for small children. A newspaper article observed that "the resurgence of playground use by smaller children is due to the fact many younger families now live in their parents' houses due to the housing crunch that hits middle class home seekers hardest." "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Over 100 years ago, Alphonse Karr (1808-1890) had it right.

In 1989 the Recreation and Park Commission approved renovation plans for the 35-year old clubhouse and in 1995 a budget was added to the Capital Division's file. Nothing happened. But now since Propositions A (Bond) and C (Open Space Fund) passed in 2000, almost every park has its place on the calendar and Junipero Serra Playground (JSP) is scheduled for renovation this fiscal year which began July 2003.

This time around, the Friends of JSP have built a corps of supporters with co-chairs Kathy Kaplan and Lisa Napoli leading the troops. Their own toddlers are in the mix of infants, preschoolers and children from surrounding schools – Lakeshore, Commodore Sloat, Jose Ortega, Lowell, St. Stephens and Brandeis Hillel – who visit the playground daily. And its deteriorated condition – carcinogenic materials, some physical hazards, lack of ADA standards – is a serious concern to the community. After repeated calls to Rec & Park's capital improvement division, Tony Leung was assigned as project director. John Thomas, landscape architect, Department of Public Works (DPW), is currently working on the children's play area, and architect Jorge Alfaro is conducting a "needs assessment" of the playground/clubhouse that includes costs of renovation or replacement.

Friends of JSP met in June and September with Leung, JSP

director Madelyn Corder, and Neighborhood Parks Council's playground campaign director Linda Hunter to discuss renovation priorities and the possible involvement of the Playground Campaign. The campaign is a partnership between NPC and Rec & Park to reduce playground renovation costs and stretch capital improvement dollars. It fosters community involvement in every phase. NPC is presently negotiating a contract with Rec & Park to ensure that there is funding for the organizing phase of this project.

In the meanwhile, Friends of JSP have surveyed park users and neighbors, and held community brainstorming about their renovation desires and priorities. Everything is in a holding pattern until the assessment (scheduled for November completion) is released. Then a steering committee – Leung, the DPW architects, Madelyn Corder, NPC (assuming funding) and Friends of JSP will meet and move to the next step of the plan.

Meanwhile on Stonecrest Drive, Directors Madelyn Corder and Glenn Havlan are engrossed in the fall recreation program for pre-school, ages 2.5-5 years; school-age, 6-12 years; and adult, 50+. Kids get into games, music, painting, crafts, ceramics, gym and basketball. Parents can sign up for the latchkey program where space is still available. The 50+ Social Club meets to enjoy art, seasonal luncheons, day trips and van trips.

From September to May, Glenn also runs the San Francisco Free Civic Theater Program, offered by Rec & Park. For park stages he produces and directs dramas cast with an ad hoc repertory company of volunteer thespians. His production of "Cinderella Waltz," written by Don Nigro, is playing at Randall Museum in November and Mission Recreation Center in December. (Information: 415-337-4713; or www.sfct.org.)

"In January 2005, Junipero Serra Playground will turn 50," says Kathy. "Our goal is to cut the ribbon on a fully renovated playground and park that the whole community will celebrate. Some people in our park were kids who grew up playing here and now bring their kids to play." Hearing a peal from 19-month old Anna, she adds, "I hope my daughter will bring her kids here."

– Jeanne Alexander, Neighborhood Parks Council

In Chronicle Watch's recent year-in-review feature, the vast majority of items reported by San Francisco citizens were related to park and open space issues.

Clearly the public cares deeply about maintenance of their public spaces and parks – and folks are fed up with the City's inability to keep them up to at least a minimum standard.

If you are interested in what San Francisco is spending on park maintenance, however, you won't easily find it. Parks don't even rate their own line item in the city budget – they are just lumped under "Culture and Recreation" and then grouped with recreation centers and other "neighborhood services" in Rec and Park's Budget. Perhaps the next Mayor will finally require a budget tracking system at Rec and Park that, together with management changes, will provide improved park maintenance.

The Recreation and Park Department recently concluded that the Department is 150 gardeners and 35 custodians short based on their preliminary analysis of what is needed to provide baseline maintenance for our parks. This is a shocking deficit and goes a long way to explain our scruffy parks and dog-eared public squares and plazas. Unfortunately, this shortfall won't likely be addressed in the next few budget years. Maintenance (or lack thereof) of our public spaces is such a visible symbol of whether or not a Mayor is doing a good job. Therefore, we suggest that our next Mayor learn from Mayor Daly in Chicago and make the delivery of parks and recreation services the test case for proving that San Francisco can provide high-quality city services more efficiently, cost-effectively and creatively.

As a starting point, we urge the Mayor to consider whether these two service areas (park and recreation) even belong under the same umbrella. Other cities, like San Jose, believe that they have achieved better results by disconnecting these very different functions, consolidating them with more similar ones, and in their case, reducing the number of city departments. Boston also has separate park and recreation functions. Certainly, the equipment needed to maintain landscapes can, as a minimum efficiency move, be pooled among the various agencies in San Francisco that do landscape maintenance and tree work.

Regardless of where parks fit in the final organizational chart under a new Mayor, the Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) has long maintained that the key to effective park-maintenance lies with individual work plans for each park. A written, detailed work plan specifying what 40-hours of tasks are assigned each week for each employee (or portion thereof) can then be compared against a master work-plan for each park with the ideal work-load of the site. The difference between the actual work plans and the ideal work plan is the necessity gap that can be filled temporarily in a variety

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UPDATES

Under a Sparkling Canopy of Lights

Thanks to everyone who joined us at South Park (Bryant/Brannan) for NPC's second annual gala – by all accounts a fabulous evening! Adding to the 1900's theme, the true hit of the evening was the horse-drawn carriage rides around the perimeter of the park. Co-chairs Jimmy and Kathy Hormel came back for not two, but three rides! Supervisors Tony Hall and Chris Daly looked on as Supervisor Bevan Dufty auctioned off his “Queen for the Night” pub-crawl, complete with door-to-door limo service. Assemblyman Mark Leno auctioned off his own power-lunch in Sacramento, contributing to the \$70,000 take for the evening! Deep gratitude to our lead sponsor, The Villas Parkmerced.

Matt to the mat

Supervisor Matt Gonzalez recently introduced crucial park legislation that urges the Rec and Park Commission and Rec and Park Dept. to immediately assess the staff and money needed to “reinvigorate and maintain the city's parks at a level that promotes use and pride in all neighborhoods of the city.”

At the subsequent City Services Committee hearing on October 30th, a roomful of park advocates testified in support of the legislation. Park supporters spoke about the poor conditions of their parks and the need for better park maintenance. As a result, Committee Chair Bevan Dufty and Committee Member Fiona Ma have joined Supervisor Gonzalez in co-sponsoring the resolution which has now passed the full Board. It turns out that Rec and Park's preliminary assessment of needs indicates that an estimated 150 additional gardeners and 35 additional custodians are required to keep the parks up to a baseline standard!

Patience is a Virtue

Supervisor Gerardo Sandoval asked Rec and Park to provide an update on the long-delayed Brooks Park Community Garden (Shields/Arch) project that was fully-funded in 1996 but which is still not finished. As of November, Rec. and Park is making plans with the Conservation Corps to take over the project – completion date is pending. Hopefully, new vegetables will be sprouting by next summer.

THANK YOU

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Rossi Romp

NPC and Friends of Rossi Playground (Arguello/Anza) held two recent workshops to determine what types of equipment neighborhood kids want in their new playground. The word on the street is that double slides are double the fun! Thanks to the students who participated and to Frank McCoppin and Presidio Hill elementary schools.

Also, a special thank you to the San Francisco Federal Credit Union whose \$1,500 check helped the group reach the \$10,000 rung on the fundraising ladder. This is a corporation with heart!

Franklin Square Fanfare

Michael Fotheringham, a landscape architect whose long list of projects includes the windmill restoration in Golden Gate Park and the renovation of Union Square, has taken a special interest in Franklin Square Playground (16th/Bryant). He has assigned his UC Davis design students to draft a new plan for the park and will be heralding the results this winter.

ParkScan Goes City-Wide

NPC is pleased to report that we can now officially call ParkScan a “city-wide” effort. At least one park in every district is being scanned on a regular basis: we are aiming to include 50 over the next four years. The general public can also send in comments on any park in the City through the ParkScan website. Check out the website to see surveys or to request an action to resolve a problem in your park (www.parkscansf.org). Or call us to start a ParkScan group in your park.

Heads-up!

Fifty neighbors and Friends of Rochambeau recently joined Supervisor Jake McGoldrick, RPD and DPW staff in a first-ever hard-hat tour and project ground breaking for the renovation of Rochambeau playground and Rec Center (24th Ave/Lake). The grand opening is scheduled for February 2004, weather permitting.

Intern Power and Super Volunteer

Thanks to all our interns – Aydin Demirtas, Koichiro Yasuba, Aaron Cleveland and Nok Korlarpkitkul and super Gala volunteer Daniel Dowdle – for their infinite creativity, hard work and dedication.

– Amber Rosenberg

CONTINUED

Chronicle Watch . . . *continued*

of ways. One of these is by encouraging volunteers to supplement the work gap.

I want to emphasize the word “temporary” here because it is key to developing a pro-labor/pro-community solution to filling the necessity gap each year. Some city workers continue to resist volunteer assistance on the grounds that they believe volunteers are supplanting permanent city jobs. This line of thinking seems to us to represent a downward spiral of negativity. Public commitment to parks is the only ammunition that gardeners have to keep their jobs in the long run. Continuing to insist that the public cannot step up to fill in the gap in public service, even on a temporary basis, is shortchanging our parks and eroding support for city staff and the managers that direct them.

The new Mayor needs to direct Rec and Park to implement the recently-approved Proposition C and produce detailed work plans for each park. These plans require a detailed description of tasks, hours/days staff will be present in each park and even a site map indicating location of activities for larger parks: “20 hours of landscaping services per week” will not cut it! Once this baseline of city work has been established for the year, a list of needed additional tasks – with required levels of skill and supervision – can be developed for volunteers. This combined list becomes the Master Volunteer Work Plan for all parks, indicating what tasks volunteers are needed for, on what basis (time, skill level), and where and how to sign-up.

A major public outreach program should promote the need for volunteers to log onto Rec and Park's web site or to visit the Volunteer Office and find the perfect volunteer opportunity. Some tasks may require no supervision and could be accomplished by individuals as their time permits, even during the week (a practice already allowed in various sites). No volunteer should be turned away, as is sometimes currently the case. Other tasks might require skill assessment and/or training, but again, this kind of volunteer arrangement already has a track record at the specialty gardens like the Rose Garden or Dahlia Garden and with partner projects such as Rebuilding Together and the National AIDS Memorial Grove. The important point is that a volunteer processing system needs to be established that is friendly, flexible and straightforward so that tasks assigned are “added value” as specified in each park's Work Plan.

This proposed process could be renewed every year. If the city's economy improves and Rec and Park fares well in the budget battles, the need for volunteers can be reduced or, better yet, volunteers can be reassigned to “spruce up” tasks (i.e. planting flowers) as opposed to core maintenance work. All of us who have volunteered for years in our parks know how valuable good city gardeners are. We know that parks need a consistent, attentive work force that unpaid help is not always willing or able to provide. Furthermore, while NPC is hopeful that the new Mayor will make parks a priority, the poor economy requires all city services to do more with less. Volunteers can fill the necessity gap and the necessity is likely to be bigger than ever.

– Isabel Wade, Editor

GREEN ENVY

Green Envy: Achieving Equity in Open Space

Perhaps one of NPC's greatest accomplishments this year is the completion of an extensive six-month study of open space acquisition in San Francisco.

San Francisco enjoys many great parks and public spaces, but there are still many neighborhoods without these vital community assets. A great city can figure out how to have well-maintained parks and ensure that all neighborhoods are equally served.

Green Envy provides important recommendations for the future, including the need for a multi-agency Open Space Council supported by the Mayor's Office to help ensure that there is coordination among all city agencies involved in open space acquisition and developments as well as key stakeholder groups.

For a copy of this study, please send \$10 to 783 Buena Vista West, San Francisco, CA 94117, or email us for an Executive Summary and e-version of the written report (without maps): jcross@sfneighborhoodparks.org.

Ring in the New Year by Sending NPC Some Holiday Cheer

As you make your gift list this year, remember NPC! Whether you donate \$35 or \$1,005, your generous gift will support our efforts to assist and advocate for our neighborhood parks – ensuring a happy New Year for all. Donations can be mailed to the Neighborhood Parks Council, 783 Buena Vista West, San Francisco, CA 94117. You can also make a secure on-line donation by credit card at www.sfneighborhoodparks.org. Thank you!

Also, we would be most grateful for assistance with the following:

- ◆ Sponsors for NPC's newsletter (6 opportunities)
- ◆ Partitions, refrigerator, furniture, park art and indoor plants for NPC's new office
- ◆ iMac 350 MHz or better. Airport or other PC or Macintosh compatible WIFI cards
- ◆ Pro bono landscape architect and plants and trees for Rossi playground
- ◆ Tech interns/volunteers for NPC's ParkScan Program

Your contribution is tax-deductible. For more information, please contact Amber Rosenberg: (415) 621-3260, arosenberg@sfneighborhoodparks.org.

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