



Following two days of torrential rain, the new state-of-the-art turf has dried and young soccer players are out on the field.

PHOTO: RICK GERHARTER

Franklin Square Park

It began in 1868 as Franklin Square when its 4.4 acres between 16th and 17th, Bryant and Hampshire Streets, were purchased for \$576,000. Ten years later the Board of Supervisors approved a bill to "immediately borrow \$100,000 in gold coin" and park commissioners allotted \$12,000 "to immediately grade, fence, plant and improve Franklin Park and conduct water pipes therein." (Alta California, 1878). It suffered a temporary loss of identity in 1950 when it was renamed Father Crowley Playground after the original Father Crowley Playground at Seventh and Harrison Streets was demolished to make room for the Bayshore Freeway. Since that park had been the first to operate under the supervision of the Playground Commission, whose president was Father Crowley, they perpetuated the name of the man said to be "the father of the playground movement." Subsequently its original name was returned to Franklin Square and the Rev. D.O. Crowley joined other memorable names in Recreation and Park history. (San Francisco City-County Record, 1936).

Surrounded by bulky industrial structures, the square provided a welcome patch of green to the families living in the neighborhood. A memorandum from the Planning Commission in 1966 observed, "Franklin Square is a genuine Victorian park. The immediate neighborhood is primarily industrial and the park provides welcome visual relief for travelers through its area. Ballplayers of all ages come here for informal games on Saturdays and Sundays. The park is on a plateau above the street and reached by steps; those at 16th and Bryant have an old fashioned grace. There are fine views toward downtown and Bernal Heights."

Another fine view included the events at Seal Stadium, located just across the street where a shopping center now stands. Sports fans without tickets could watch the games sitting on the Franklin Park hill. And they did until November of 1959 when the wreckers' ball arrived to make way for the new complex.

As more families were drawn to the neighborhood and into the park, increased complaints about deteriorating conditions and a lack of recreational facilities for small children were heard. At a public hearing in 1969, the Park Commission was offered a renovation plan by the United Neighborhood Association. Its fate remains unknown.

The soccer field got its start in an appropriation for construction in

a 1984 Commission meeting. In constant and vigorous use since it was built, it was approved for extensive renovation and expansion in 1995. En route down the bureaucratic path, the substandard restroom was replaced by portable toilets, now also removed because of unsuitable use and safety concerns.

Completed and officially celebrated last month in late January, the enlarged-to-regulation-size field has a new irrigation and drainage system and state-of-the-art synthetic turf that looks like grass, outlasts all other varieties and is safer to play on. Games at this "permit only" facility are booked by clubs and schools from all over the area at \$40 for 2 hours. Rec and Park's Michael Cheatham, in athletic fields reservation, says he "gives schools a break." The renovation also included new, accessible picnic tables, new benches and a paint job on the children's playground equipment. The \$800,000 cost has put some other park improvements on hold.

Enter Jason Born, the park's new resident advocate and NPC Board member. Some 15 months ago, Jason was struck by both the beauty and the grunge he encountered on his early morning walk through Franklin Square park. He decided to get involved and was led to contact NPC. He is working with a short list of key people at Rec and Park and DPW on problems of immediate concern while a longer list of needs and activities goes out on his newsletter *Swing!* (SoMa West Interactive Neighborhood Group). Readers learning about the needle-infested sandbox in the children's playground and the crucial need for portable toilets are urged to support NPC's Playground Campaign (contact: Linda Hunter 415-621-3260). In the good news column: the end is in sight for the controversial location within the park of San Francisco's day labor hiring hall and the problems connected to the population that gathers around its trailers and portable toilets. "We have a building," says Renee Saucedo of La Raza Centro Legal and "we hope to move this spring or summer."

"Franklin Square Park is this neighborhood's only park," Jason observes, adding that "with the community's involvement, we are going to make it into a jewel of an outdoor space."

— Jeanne Alexander, Neighborhood Parks Council

The budget battles will be fierce this year, with likely cuts to as many as 80 positions providing recreation activities for all ages and maintenance in our parks.

Unfortunately, very little detail is available to the public to review any specific budget proposals, make informed decisions based on costs and benefits, and provide feedback on the budget priorities except in the most general way. (For the budget presentation, see http://parks.sfgov.org/site/recpark_page.asp?id=21277 on RPD's website). However, a closer review of Recreation and Park Department's budget and expense reports for specific programs (available from the City Controller's office) uncovers a startling fact about our recreation priorities as we face major service cutbacks: Golf is now the number one service priority of RPD and will remain so even in the City's worst budget crisis since World War II.

In San Francisco's very constrained city limits, with increasing multi-use demands on precious parkland, we have more golf courses per acre of city land than the 25 biggest cities in the country. While golf is a fine recreation, it polled as the least important recreation priority in a San Francisco survey by David Binder. Given the challenges facing RPD in finding adequate space for soccer and athletic fields, dog parks and neighborhood parks for those areas without them, dedication of all this land to golf was only tolerable because of the revenue it raised for the rest of RPD's programs – more than \$1.5 million annually. In 2002, however, RPD created an organizational and funding structure aimed at restoring the city's golf courses, especially Harding Park. A Golf Fund was established to improve maintenance of the City's six golf courses, segregating all golf operations and subsequent revenues from the rest of RPD. The golden goose was now laying eggs only on the finely manicured turf of Harding Park.

The goose requires high maintenance, however, and 35 gardeners are required to keep up Harding and the other golf courses. (In comparison, there are only 62 gardeners in all of Golden Gate Park.) No cutbacks are planned for this crew even in an \$8.5 million crisis and five additional gardeners may be moved over to the Golf Fund. Obviously, golf courses are not as desirable with gopher holes and weeds in the turf and it's great to have some of our park land maintained to a high standard. Yet these conditions are routinely accepted in our soccer fields and neighborhood parks and we are an estimated 150 gardeners short in the rest of the park system according to RPD's own estimates! Certainly the greens of our neighborhood parks affect far more San Franciscans than golf, but the 'rub' is that they do not generate revenue – whereas golf does.

The promise of this revenue and its potential spillover for improvements to adjacent parks is what convinced the Parks, Recreation, Open Space Advisory Committee (PROSAC) to accept RPD's proposal to

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UPDATES

Rossi playground gains Green

A huge thank you to **Jessica Green** of **Green Design Studio** for stepping up to design the Rossi playground (Arguello/Anza) pro bono. Jessica has collaborated on a number of projects ranging in location from Southern California, Oregon, and Washington for various Bay Area firms. Jessica met with the members of Friends of Rossi Playground January 15 to discuss initial design plans and made site visits to a few recently completed City playgrounds.

Drum roll, please

A round of applause for **Margaret Goodale** of **Randall Museum** who received the **2004 Terwilliger Environmental Award** for her dedication and ceaseless contributions to environmental education. During her 13 years working at the Randall Museum, Goodale has taught over 50,000 children, organized monthly San Francisco Natural History lectures, and orchestrated the annual native plant poster exhibit "Inviting Wildlife into the City."

Congrats to the "green" winners of **San Francisco Beautiful's** 2003 Beautification Awards: **Glen Canyon Park Habitat Restoration** (Elk/Chenery), **Daniel E. Koshland Park & Community Garden** (Page/Buchanan) and **Corwin Street Community Garden** (Corwin/Acme).

Still waiting...

The long-postponed **Brooks Park Community Garden** (Shields/Arch) project, originally funded in March 1996 is still waiting to be finished. The responsibility for the garden has been in limbo between SLUG, the Conservation Corps, and the Department of Public Works. It now appears that SLUG will be building the garden after all. Brooks Park supporters are hoping the Open Space fund will supply the \$20,000 this year to turn this 10-year-old garden project into an actual garden.

Rally against reassessment

Margaret Brodtkin of **Coleman Advocates** and **Neighborhood Parks Council's** Executive Director **Isabel Wade** spoke against lowering the tax assessments on commercial properties at the Board of Appeals Hearing on January 22. The city stands to lose \$100 million in property taxes if these properties are reassessed, directly impacting both the Children's Fund and the Open Space Fund which depend on property taxes. Brodtkin and Wade argued that homeowners will be hit twice by reductions on commercial properties - first with the likelihood of new tax measures to replace the lost dollars and secondly with the cut to city services like parks, schools, and recreation programs.

Enjoying the new digs

Not a single piece of Daniel's delicious bruschetta was left on the platter at the NPC Open House, January 28. Approximately 70 people attended the event in the new office in Hayes Valley. Everyone agreed that the new larger space with close proximity to City Hall will make great headquarters for park advocacy.

Hellos and good-byes

Welcome the newest member of the ParkScan team, **Mark Hymel**, who joined us toward the end of 2003 as the Community and Agency Relations Director (mhymel@sfneighborhoodparks.org). Mark brings his experience developing technology-based nonprofit programs and advocating for the use of technology to coordinate,

inform, and stretch the impact of resources in times of scarcity. San Francisco provides an excellent model.

Amber Rosenberg, Communications Director, has departed from her position at the Neighborhood Parks Council, but will be remembered for her amazing success at putting NPC on the map with media coverage of events and park issues. Amber plans to remain active in San Francisco advocacy circles. **Vidya Tikku**, District Park Planning Program Manager, after two terrific years of improving San Francisco's neighborhood parks through district park planning, is moving to the East Coast with her new husband. She hopes to get more involved in urban planning issues.

Steppin' up

Friends of 16th Avenue Tiled Steps (16th Ave/Moraga) have submitted a permit request to the city and are seeking the critical support of Supervisor Tony Hall. To involve local Sunset businesses, the project stepped out with a neighborhood merchant walk on January 24. The momentum continued with a successful open house on January 31 showcasing the design for the steps and a mosaic sample step riser made by the artists.

Ground-breaking for new Mission district park

Friday, November 7 was the long-awaited ground-breaking for the soon-to-be children's park in the North Mission on (Hoff near 16th/Mission). Ten years ago children attending nearby St. John's Educational Thresholds Center did a study of children's needs in the area and concluded that what was most wanted was a park. A new generation of kids will be working on a name for the park, which is scheduled to open summer 2004.

Green scheme

Isabel Wade headed the Rec and Park transition team for newly inaugurated Mayor Newsom. The team made recommendations including ways to maximize resources and widen community involvement. In February, park advocates will meet with Mayor Newsom to make additional suggestions regarding park maintenance issues, capital planning projects, and long-term visions for San Francisco's neighborhood parks. The Neighborhood Parks Council has collected over 40 surveys to find out what issues are most important to park users and will share the compiled surveys with the Mayor. If you would like to give your input contact Betty, NPC, at 621-3260, x101.

Want to lead a walk in your park or neighborhood?

Calling all park enthusiasts who would like to lead a tour through their neighborhood park or a walk in your community that would include a few parks. If you, or someone you know, would be interested in leading a walk any time this year, please contact Betty, NPC, at 621-3260, x101. NPC will help with the arrangements and can provide park histories if needed.

– Justina Cross

NPC has moved!

We've moved! NPC's new address is: 451 Hayes St., 2nd Fl., San Francisco, CA 94102. Don't fear change, our phone number and email addresses remain the same. Also please note our new fax number 415-703-0889.

CONTINUED

Budget Cuts . . . *continued*

create a Golf Fund, restricting use of revenues only to golf courses. The Committee further agreed to RPD's "borrowing" \$15 million for the renovation of Harding Park from state funds intended for neighborhood park improvement projects in low-income areas. PROSAC's understanding was that the opportunity cost to neighborhood parks of losing the revenues was minimal because RPD could only handle so many capital projects at one time. These "borrowed" funds were to be repaid to the Open Space Fund annually, PROSAC was told, with interest as well – augmenting the total funds available for more park improvement projects. And last, but not least for the Committee, was the promise of the "First Tee" program included in the Harding package – an effort to involve low-income, youth-of-color in a predominantly white, upper middle-class sport.

To date, none of the promises that appeared to make the "lock up" of golf revenues worthwhile, have been realized. Most alarming, RPD leadership has indicated that due to the half a million dollar revenue shortfall in this current year's budget, the Open Space Fund may not be repaid from the Golf Fund as promised – not to speak of any "waterfall" of extra revenues going into a single neighborhood park. There is as yet no "First Tee" program. Finally, PROSAC attempted to schedule the topic of the Golf Fund on its February agenda, but RPD staff were not prepared to provide the necessary reports and accounting.

It is important to reconsider this program and its revenues next fiscal year in light of RPD's dire financial situation threatening to decimate park maintenance and recreation services. The primary subsidy to golf is the vast amount of land that is devoted for its exclusive use. If revenues are the key consideration, perhaps we could derive revenues and higher public use from some other activity on at least one of the courses. To sit by and allow a low-priority recreation service to escape the scrutiny of budget analysis, while the City already cannot provide Recreation Directors at new Centers in low-income neighborhoods (e.g. Visitacion Valley and the Mission), is not acceptable.

Since the Commission cannot seem to address these types of issues, perhaps the Board of Supervisors and our new Mayor can. Supervisor Hall strongly supported the golf plan at a time when the economic situation in the city was very different. He also promised that he would reconsider the Golf Fund if it negatively affected our neighborhood parks. If he understood that recreational centers might be closed one day per week, would he still be committed to the exclusive use of golf revenues for golfers? If he learns that no flowers will be planted at any park under current proposals for next year, will he still allow golf funds to be locked up for manicured putting greens and to subsidize further improvements that benefit golfers exclusively? While NPC would like to see the budgets of 'sacred cow' services (e.g. Police and Fire) also analyzed with a fine-tooth comb for possible reductions, we are not holding our breath for elected officials to make these cuts. So given the need to set priorities for RPD dollars, we support soccer balls for kids any day over golf balls.

– Isabel Wade, Editor

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