

In 1986, parents and children in the Tenderloin flocked to Boeddeker Park to celebrate its first anniversary.



PHOTO: RECREATION AND PARK PUBLIC INFORMATION DEPT.

Father Alfred Boeddeker Park

“An urban oasis in the Tenderloin opens with hope and trepidation” said the San Francisco Examiner when Boeddeker Park was dedicated in March, 1985. The two-and-a-half acre site, originally named Central City Park, extended from the corner of Eddy and Jones (former home of the Downtown Bowling Alley) to a midblock section of Ellis between Jones and Taylor. Funded with over \$3 million from the Open Space “High Need Program” and \$200,000 from the Mayor’s Office of Community Development, the park was created to provide green space and recreation for the Tenderloin’s 2,500 residents mostly comprised of seniors, Southeast Asian parents and their children. It was designed to survive in a neighborhood notorious for its sub population of drug dealers, drunks and vagrants. The park featured a six-foot fence with spiked tips, low-lying shrubbery, brick-walled terraces, and wrought iron benches whose seats with metal dividers were impossible to sleep on. A wide brick pathway enabled police to drive a patrol car straight through from Eddy to Ellis.

At the opening, Mayor Dianne Feinstein renamed the park for Father Alfred Boeddeker, the Franciscan priest who established the nearby St. Anthony Dining room. A year later, the park’s first anniversary was marked by installing two original sculptures—Bruce Hasson’s ark, symbolizing the park as sanctuary for neighborhood families and Tenderloin resident Anthony Smith’s pair of hands cupped around a globe inset with life-size faces of twelve residents, representing the rich variety of cultures and ages in the Tenderloin community.

That anniversary year ended with a press report of angry, frightened children writing letters to Mayor Feinstein about “bullies and drunken men in the park” and saying “we can’t even play in the park any more.” The problems and the battle to solve them continued.

The ‘90s brought significant renovations: a new children’s playground and recreation center; extra lighting at night; a \$200,000 Boeddeker Park Renovation Project, funded by the Rotary Club, which included access ramps; new fencing and lawn; a new tot’s play area with rubber matting replacing the broken glass and needle-filled sand; a friendlier Eddy Street entrance; newly painted benches and lightposts. In a letter to the Open Space Program, the commanding officer of the Tenderloin Task Force wrote that the officers “. . . are committed to the slow but steady improvement in the quality of life in the Tenderloin and we feel that Boeddeker

Park is a vital element.” In 1998 a well-loved police officer, Sergeant Kenneth Sugrue, 39, died of a heart attack and to honor his commitment to kids, the tot’s playground was dedicated to him. In the same year, a group of residents, park officials, and business people formed a “Save Boeddeker Park Task Force.”

Funding from the Mayor’s Public Space Improvement Program planted the seeds for a community garden in 2001 and the SF League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) turned the \$42,546 grant into a plot of fragrant flowers and edible herbs.

Fast forward to ‘04, Boeddeker Park has a new Friends team and new ParkScan technology. ParkScan, funded by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, is NPC’s pioneering program that sends trained volunteers out to inspect and record conditions in the parks. Armed with handheld computers and digital cameras, they document their findings—everything from clogged drains to dead pigeons in the garden—and send them electronically to the Recreation and Park Department before posting them on the internet (www.parkscansf.org). Working with the new Friends group since it emerged a year ago, Daniel Stein joined ParkScan last fall. He reports clear signs of progress, noting that “Rec and Park is much more responsive to our complaints.” With the arrival of park supervisor Thomas Wang, the once garbage-strewn, neglected garden is clean and beautiful, filled with thriving new plantings. And the disruptive drug gang that hung out and played dominos at the adjacent game boards has largely disappeared with posting of long-sought “No Dominos or Loud Music” signs. Recreation director Robert McDaniels recently posted the summer program ranging from Cooking for Kids to Senior Bingo, Tutor Homework, and Weight Lifting. In March, Friends of Rec and Park’s (renamed San Francisco Parks Trust) Project ReCreation devoted its one-day program to Boeddeker, making visible improvements both indoors and out including a new wall mural and bike racks.

Daniel’s wish that, “in a year, I hope we’ll all be able to sit down in a peaceful park,” is shared with the gentle man who gave the park its name. At the groundbreaking 21 years ago, Father Alfred Boeddeker prayed, “May it be peaceful.” The hope seems on its way to fulfillment.

– Jeanne Alexander, Neighborhood Parks Council

“If we want to remain a compassionate city, we must have the courage to change how we run city government.”

– SF Mayor Gavin Newsom

The park advocates who turned out for the Save Our Parks rally in May on the steps of City Hall and who tirelessly wrote letters or made phone calls to urge the Mayor not to make cuts to gardening positions can breathe a sigh of relief.

For the first time in a major financial crisis, the Recreation and Park Department has not received disproportionate cuts in its budget and there will be no cuts to gardener positions. Gardening staff over the decades has been decimated and is now an estimated 150 positions short of a level to provide a good standard of care in our parks. The mayor’s budget is a refreshing change from the usual meat-axe approach to services traditionally seen as easy targets (i.e. recreation and parks) and it is a promising beginning in reinventing past budget practices and setting priorities based on policy objectives.

At the same time, difficult cuts are proposed in every department; and Recreation and Park is no exception. Six vacant recreation positions and ten filled positions are recommended for elimination within the proposed budget, along with numerous administrative positions and pool cashiers. While any staff reduction is painful, both to the staff involved and to park patrons, we support the Department and the Mayor in making these strategic choices.

San Francisco now has more full-time recreation staff than most other cities on the West Coast, regardless of population. Despite recent reductions, the number of recreation staff is near an all-time high. This saturated workforce, however, has not improved the public’s satisfaction with programming; according to the City Survey 2004 (see http://www.sfgov.org/site/controller_index.asp), satisfaction with programs for children and youth has actually declined 6% since 2003. Less than

half those surveyed considered the programs and activities for adults “good or very good.” We clearly are not getting results from our investment in staffing and we should be delving into the causes rather than simply assuming that more is better.



The high numbers of recreation staff most likely is attributed to San Francisco having far more recreation centers than other West Coast cities: Portland has only 15 and Seattle 24; San Diego (population over 1 million) has only 48 and Los Angeles (population over 3 million) has 128 recreation centers. San Francisco, with 127,344 children and a total of a scant 800,000 people, has 95 recreation

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UPDATES

Welcome to the team

We have added five new members to the Board of Directors. **Jason Born**, founder of SWING!, is leading the charge to renovate Franklin Square; **Benjamin Gettleman**, Barbary Coast Consulting, and NPC's youngest member; **Staci Slaughter**, Vice President of Communications with the San Francisco Giants; **Janan New**, Executive Director of the San Francisco Apartment Association, and **Mark Primeau**, former Director of Dept. of Public Works and current consultant. Each brings a unique set of skills and their enthusiasm for neighborhood parks to assist NPC's initiatives.

Solutions make an impression on the Mayor

Our NPC coalition members met with **Mayor Newsom** on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, to discuss and provide creative solutions to key issues such as park maintenance taking into account the impending budget cuts. The meeting included testimonials from 11 leaders of neighborhood park groups; it was followed by a rally in May on the steps of city hall with over 100 park advocates and remarks for parks from Supervisors **Fiona Ma**, **Sophie Maxwell**, and **Jake McGoldrick**. The results: no gardeners have been cut from the budget!

New faces in park management

Elizabeth Goldstein, former General Manager of Rec and Park, has accepted the Executive Director position at California State Parks Foundation. **Yomi Agunibade**, former Capital Program Manager at Rec and Park, is the new Acting General Manager of Rec and Park and **Dan Mauer** has taken his place as head of capital projects. **Michael Frank**, Director of Finance and Administration, will be leaving July 1st.

Youth lend energy to park clean-ups

Students at Lowell High School are assisting the **Friends of Rolph-Nicol Playground** with regular workdays at the park on the second Saturday of each month. About a dozen students and their teacher **Todd Ditto** from Gateway High School work regularly with **Friends of Boeddeker Park** in the Tenderloin, cleaning and planting in the community garden every third Saturday.

Spotlight on new park groups

NPC proudly announces the establishment of three new park groups. **Friends of Precita Park**, located in District 9, (Contact: Sally Hartzell, 550-0628); **Friends of Golden Gate Heights Park** (Contact: Sally Stephens, 664-3460); and **Friends of Fallen Bridges/18th St. & Utah Mini Park** (Contact: Jean Bogiages, jean@woodwinds.net). **Fallen Bridges** held their first clean-up March 27 where neighbors planted greenery and laid a new path.

Getting dirty pays off

The **Friends of Ina Coolbrith Park** (Taylor & Vallejo) celebrated the completion of phase one (started in 1999) of renewing the historic vista and stairway park with Supervisor **Aaron Peskin** and staff from RPD & DPW during the replanting day on April 17.

Taking advice from Mom

Kudos to the playground moms who have taken time to mentor budding park groups. **Sue Chang** has lent her expertise to both the **Friends of Rossi Playground** and the moms at **Junipero Serra Playground** (**Lisa Napoli** and **Kathy Kaplan**) who, in turn, shared their experiences with **Friends of St. Mary's Park**. NPC has encouraged this model of "each one teach one" for seven years. If you have

a special skill or experience that you would like to share with others, please volunteer to mentor a park group. Call NPC at 621-3260.

Mission community rallies around their parks

On May 21, neighbors of Garfield and Rolph parks met Acting General Manager **Yomi Agunbiade** at St. Peter's Parish Hall in the heart of the Mission to share concerns about their parks and especially access to playing fields for neighborhood kids. The meeting was organized by the **St. Peter's Organizing Project** and **Good Samaritan Family Resource Center**. Yomi made a general commitment to keep the parks open and accessible to the community but Rec and Park needs to work out the details of usage and fees with them. This again shows the great need for usable open space in San Francisco, especially in neighborhoods with a high concentration of young people such as the Mission.

KidPower Park

In the last newsletter, we told you about plans for the new Mission district park on Hoff St. near 16th and Mission Streets. It now has a name, "KidPower Park" chosen by the youth who will be using it and unanimously approved by the Rec and Park Commission. They plan to celebrate its grand opening in late summer 2004.

Capital program cuts

Over 20 capital projects been halted and moved to the unfunded list, including NPC's Rossi Playground Project: Lincoln Playground, Moscone Rec Center, Fay Park gardens, South Sunset Playground, Hamilton Playground and Rec Center, Junipero Serra Playground, Lake Merced, Midtown Terrace, Sunnyside Conservatory, Playground and Clubhouse, Buena Vista Park landscaping, Glen Park Playground, Rolph Playground and Clubhouse, St. Mary's Playground, Potrero Hill Playground, and the Visitacion Valley Greenway. All projects in years 5-10 of the capital program are also on hold until more funding can be identified.

– Justina Cross

Want to Lead a Walk of Your Park or Neighborhood?

The Amazing World of Insects Discovery Tour in Glen Canyon Park on June 26 was a great kick-off to the Nature in the City program. We are looking for other park enthusiasts who would like to lead a tour through their neighborhood park. 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.

Mark your calendars and lend a hand

Our Annual Gala at South Park is Thursday, September 30th from 6 to 9pm. Besides wonderful food, drink and entertainment, this year's theme is Celebrating Art in the Parks and will feature live art demonstrations. We really could use your assistance this year in procuring auction items, selling tickets (\$100 ea or \$75 ea before July 31st) and volunteering for the day of the event. Please call or email Marianne if you can help at 621-3260 x106 or mgabel@sfneighborhoodparks.org.

Don't crush me!

NPC has leased an electric Ford Think for two years, which has been the perfect urban vehicle for toting things to and from meetings and events. Now Ford is recalling all zero-emissions electric vehicles and crushing them (see www.dontcrush.com for more information). NPC lacks any comparable replacement and our lease was terminated in May. If you have a used car that you would like to donate in-kind to NPC, contact Daniel at 621-3260. Thank you.

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Sigh of Relief for Rec & Park . . . *continued*

centers and club houses (85 are staffed). The point is not that we are overstaffed for the current number of facilities we have in San Francisco. Rather, we need to look at how we are staffing and what services are being requested by the community as well as whether we can afford opening all of the facilities we have (most of which are not open the hours that the public would like).

The discussion of staffing, programming and getting the best bang for the limited bucks available, needs to include the facility renovation program. San Francisco is still at the beginning of its capital renovation program funded by the Neighborhood Park Bond and the Open Space Fund. It might make sense, for example, to build larger centers with multi-purpose spaces rather than planning to renovate each of the one-room club houses which have limited use and which stretch staffing resources. The full cost of completion of all of our park and recreation facilities is now estimated at over \$800,000 million and perhaps more, so we need to look very closely at how many centers we are trying to keep open. San Francisco is, after all, a very compact city with most locations accessible by public transit.

As a tried but true saying goes, 'There is opportunity in every crisis.' The Mayor has set a new direction for the city with his first budget to make the business of the city about delivering service at a reasonable cost. It will be interesting to see if the Mayor can use the budget process to implement a vision of a more effective, compassionate, cleaner and greener city. The Board of Supervisors should embrace this new direction. We urge readers to support the proposed Rec and Park Budget and to remain vigilant throughout the completion (set to be approved August 1) of the budget process by writing letters, making calls, and most importantly speaking up for parks at Board budget hearings.

– Isabel Wade, Editor

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PARKSCAN

Help maintain neighborhood parks – with just a few clicks

ParkScan is an innovative program of the Neighborhood Parks Council. Coupled with handheld computers and digital cameras, volunteer teams survey their parks each month to evaluate features such as restrooms, playground equipment, lawns and benches for cleanliness, safety and usability. Health and safety hazards as well as graffiti are sent immediately to Rec and Park via the Internet for action, while other unsatisfactory conditions are prioritized by the volunteer observer group to be resolved later by the responsible city agency. Survey data and accompanying photos are first uploaded to ParkScan's web site, compiled at NPC and then sent to the City. Rec and Park responds to these observations with information about the planned maintenance or timing of any capital improvements. These responses are also posted on the ParkScan web site, providing a unique collaborative forum where the public can help the city identify maintenance needs, and where the city departments can inform the public about the status of maintenance requests. Twenty park routes are currently being surveyed by volunteer teams, and many more parks are slated to come on line this year.

Anyone can also submit comments about any neighborhood park at ParkScan's web site – you don't need to be a ParkScan volunteer, and the park does not have to be one that is currently scanned. ParkScan encourages the public to visit www.parkscansf.org and submit comments (and up to three photos to help document the reported condition) by clicking on the "Send Comments About A Park" link.

ParkScan's success is based on the participation of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers who want to create positive change in their parks. Neighborhood parks across the city are already seeing measurable results and Rec and Park is enthusiastic about the "extra eyes" given staffing cuts over the past couple of years.

If you are interested in becoming a ParkScan volunteer, or if you would like more information about ParkScan, please contact Alfredo Pedroza at 621-3260.

Webmasters: We would love to see a ParkScan link added to your web site and to have you encourage your visitors to submit comments about San Francisco's neighborhood parks: www.parkscansf.org/Public/PublicComment.aspx.

ParkScan Developing Youth Program

The ParkScan program is seeking youth participants to assist adult ParkScan observer groups with their hand-helds (PDAs) and eventually mentor new ParkScan observers. Please contact Mark Hymel at 621-3260 or mhymel@sfneighborhoodparks.org with names of possible youth leaders. We are also looking for partner organizations (e.g., church, sports or cultural club, or high school) with a strong youth membership.

Seeking hardware

Do you love your neighborhood park, but find that you're too busy to volunteer as a ParkScan observer? Here's a way for you to help ParkScan that requires little time. ParkScan is in need of a desktop PC and would be delighted to accept the donation of a new computer. If you'd like to buy a computer for ParkScan, please contact David Ketchum at 621-3260 or dketchum@sfneighborhoodparks.org to discuss our specific needs. Alternatively, if you've upgraded to a new computer recently, we'd gladly accept your donation of a functional desktop PC or laptop with Windows 2000 or Windows XP. We will also accept a cash donation of any amount to help us buy one.