



Balboa Park and Playground

— *Jeanne Alexander*

When the City gave Balboa Park over to the San Francisco Parks Commission in 1909, the first call on its budget was \$100 for a band. The Ingleside Improvement Club wanted it for the dedication ceremony the following year. They got it and the park was oompahed in, October 19th, 1910. One Commission report that year noted that Balboa Park surrounded the House of Corrections and that progress was being made on a new ball field.

Two ball fields, and a successor to that House — the Ingleside Police Station — are fixtures in the 21-acre park today. But, beginning in the 1950s, changes and improvements came slowly and incrementally. In 1946, plans to build temporary housing in the park for returning veterans and their families got underway, and in 1948 141 two-and-four room apartments were ready for occupants. In 1951, the Board of Supervisors allocated \$40,000 for a soccer field that required \$110,000 more and Mayor Elmer Robinson approved paying it from the Recreation bond, noting that people had been working and fighting for it since 1907. In 1952 the Recreation and Park Department granted the New Mission Terrace Improvement Association \$34,750 for replacing the Park irrigation system, completing two baseball diamonds, and lighting the tennis courts. In 1994 a City College plan to acquire the Park for recreational and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth failed and it remained a park for all its neighborhoods.

Located in the Outer Mission/Excelsior/Ingleside District, Balboa Park serves as a district, a neighborhood, and a public park. Its wide range of facilities includes two baseball and two softball fields, a soccer stadium, swimming pool with changing room, picnic area with tables and benches, tennis courts and a new playground.

The Playground

Built in the 1970s, the playground became dilapidated and dangerous after 38 years of heavy use in the area with the highest number of children in San Francisco. The Friends of Balboa Park Playground, a group of local residents, got together to replace it and provide a community gathering space. They raised money from their neighbors and local businesses, and, working with the Neighborhood Parks Council and Rec and Park, FOBPP received funding from the national nonprofit KaBOOM!, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and a \$75,000 Community Challenge grant from the Mayor's Office for an ADA accessible pathway to the new playground. The total amount raised by the Friends was between \$600,000-\$700,000, according to John Katz, one of FOBPP's core group of movers and shakers.



KIDS & PARENTS SPREAD OUT ALL OVER THE NEW PLAYGROUND ON OPENING DAY, BY MEREDITH THOMAS

Rome wasn't built in a day, but on March 4, 2008, Balboa Playground was. With the old structure demolished by Rec and Park, over 475 adults and children converged on the Mission Terrace site for Playground Rebuild Day.

At the end of the day it was Mission Accomplished: on the rubber surface are a tot lot and a larger play area with a rock-climbing wall; new orange, green and purple play structures; a play gym and a jungle gym with slides.

Another improvement mission for the park is in development. The Trust for Public Land is taking on the renovation of Balboa Park, says its program manager Jacob Gilchrist. "We are just beginning the community process and working with Rec and Park" he explains, adding that there is \$900,000 in the FY08/09 city budget, but cannot predict what the total budget need will be. Marvin Yee, landscape architect at Rec and Park's Capital Improvement Division, expects to know more after members of his staff and TPL do a joint reconnaissance of the site.

John Katz says Friends are proud and grateful for TPL's commitment and are looking forward to the neighborhood community outreach that they will be involved in. He enthusiastically notes, "Without NPC and its staff, we wouldn't be what and where we are as an organization today, or be able to take advantage of this tremendous opportunity." Balboa Park is ready for its makeover.

Established: 1910

Location: Between Ocean & San Jose Avenues

Buses: Muni J,K,M; Bart, Balboa Park Station

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To read more of Jeanne Alexander's San Francisco park histories, please visit <http://www.sfnpc.org/parkhistories>



Parks in the News

Mayor Picks New Interim Director for Rec and Park

On October 8th, Mayor Newsom selected San Francisco Environment Director Jared Blumfeld to serve as interim Director of the Recreation and Park Department until a permanent director is hired. Blumfeld, Environment Director since 2001, has 20 years of wide ranging experience in environmental issues. This useful background put him in good stead as he dealt with what wasn't working on Day 1 – the longtime water leak in Bayview's Adam Rogers Park. Meanwhile, former parks chief Yomi Agunbiade will move to the SF Public Utilities Commission as director of PUC's Wastewater- improvement Program.

NPC and FUF District Debates

Debates among the candidates running in the November 4th election for seven District Supervisor positions concluded in October. Hosted by NPC and Friends of the Urban Forest, the non-partisan debates focused on quality of life, environmental, park and recreation issues. Involved were candidates for Districts 1,3,4,5,7,9 and 11. NPC distributed a questionnaire to candidates and incumbents beforehand, who were awarded a "Park Friendly" rating based on their responses. Responses are posted on the NPC website <http://www.sfnpc.org/supervisordebates2008>, as well as the list of Park Friendly candidates. May the friendly succeed!

A LITTLE GREEN GOES A LONG WAY...

For as little as \$10 a month, you can make a difference in helping to revitalize San Francisco's neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Give the gift that keeps on giving all year long. GIVING IS AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3...

1. Give Online – Make a secure donation through NPC's website at www.sfnpc.org
2. Send an Email – Contact our Director of Development, Lyn Spataro at lspataro@sfnpc.org
3. Give Us a Call – Call our Development Department at (415) 621-3260

Whatever way you choose to give, your contribution will result in a real change in our parks and their management. Your donation is vital to NPC's continuing efforts to realize our vision of a world-class parks system for San Francisco.

If you have questions regarding gifts of stock, planned giving or other ways to give, please contact NPC's Development Director, Lyn Spataro. Thanks for your support!

Open Space Task Force

"The Future of Open Space in San Francisco" was the subject of NPC's Coalition Meeting on October 15th. Panelists Maya Donelson (Grace the Roof), Arden Bucklin-Sporr (Director of Educational Gardens for SFUSD), Susan King (Sunday Streets), and Tom Arie-Donch discussed innovative and creative types of open space. Astrid Haryati of the Mayor's Office and Sarah Dennis of the Planning Department gave an overview of the Mayor's Open Space Task Force and announced a Community Workshop series beginning in November.

The Task Force, conceived by Isabel Wade and coordinated by NPC's very talented Karin Edwards, was launched in November '07 and has involved several hundred city officials, park advocates, planners and community leaders. It is charged with creating a vision and Action Plan for San Francisco's open spaces in the 21st century. Latest plans and an opportunity for you to share your ideas for enhancing the city's green spaces can be found at <http://openspacesf.org/>

Improvements on Playground Report Card

Upgrading playgrounds was jump-started by the Playground Initiative last March. The NPC/RPD joint venture focuses on improving playgrounds classified as 'failing' (unsafe for children to use) in NPC's Playground '08 Report Card. With a series of safety improvement and cleanup workdays conducted by NPC and community volunteers, 8 of the "failing 10" have been completed. These are: Sunset and West Sunset Playgrounds, DiMaggio North Beach, Lincoln Park, Merced Heights, Silver Terrace, Crocker Amazon Moscow and Geneva. Staffer Sunya Ojure reports that Cayuga and Herz, the remaining two playgrounds, will be done in the next month. She also expresses the Initiative staff's deep thanks to SF Beautiful for its \$5000 grant to buy clean, arsenic-free sand for some of the playgrounds they have worked on. Photos of the workdays can be found on NPC's website <http://www.sfnpc.org/playgroundsuccesses>

Kiosks — The New Low Tech Communication

In 2006 the City approved a Community Challenge Grant to NPC to build kiosks in three neighborhood parks — a long-desired improvement that allows park groups to post notices of events, volunteer work days, and other relevant information. Kiosk construction and installation is a community event that requires the collaboration and coordination of park groups, volunteers, Rec and Park and NPC. NPC has stretched the dollars of the grant to install information kiosks in Alamo Square, Dolores Park and Mountain Lake Park. Next on the list is Balboa Park, then Crocker Amazon.



Volunteers Are the Answer to Economic Doom and Gloom

— Isabel Wade, Executive Director

What will the impact be of our imploding economy on parks? Will we have to close some parks, as was recently suggested for the City of Oakland and by the Governor for 46 state parks, or will we just continue to ask Rec and Park to pull rabbits out of a hat that already has a huge hole in it? NPC suggests that the answer to retaining maintenance levels (e.g. keeping staff) and even improving our green spaces lies with growing our volunteer base and creating a more sophisticated and inviting volunteer program.

First, we need to start by making the same kind of cultural shift at Rec and Park in promoting the importance of volunteers that the Golden Gate National Recreation Area has made under its exceptional director, Brian O'Neil. Over the last twenty years, O'Neil has converted the line staff to a volunteer-friendly crew that understands that their main task is not really gardening but rather to oversee the effective gardening of volunteers. According to O'Neil, "There is simply no way we could maintain this park without volunteers." Consequently, personality is the main characteristic considered in new hires since gardening skills can be acquired.

Second, we need to make more opportunities for weekday volunteering in our parks. The GGNRA aggressively promotes volunteer opportunities during the week, especially for school children. But many other adult volunteers are looking for parks to help in San Francisco or just an opportunity to 'give back' to the City. Right now, many of them head to the GGNRA since Rec & Park does not offer individual drop-in opportunities. Just check out the website of the GGNRA to see how easy and attractive they make volunteering: www.nps.gov/goga/supportyourpark/volunteer.htm

And note the statement: "Volunteers at Golden Gate play a vital role in almost all aspects of park operations."

In contrast, the Rec and Park Department Community Catalyst newsletter lists only two specific opportunities during the week where volunteers can assist; all other regular workdays are on weekends. Having regular volunteer opportunities (i.e. repeat customers!) is essential to keeping up our parks. Because this means overtime hours for RPD staff, however, and because there is an ongoing budget crisis, RPD still sees volunteers as a resource drain rather than a value-added resource. NPC recommends a volunteer certification program be established by the Department that allows volunteers with proven skills to be able to assist on their own time with pre-approved tasks under an approved park work plan. This already happens for some sites, such as the Dahlia Garden in Golden Gate Park. Our neighborhood parks are in



VOLUNTEERS, BY: LARS UHDE

need of many simple tasks and basic gardening. Those who offer their services to our parks have been found to become the best advocates for staving off the perennial budget cuts to RPD and in the passage of bonds and park ballot measures. Let's encourage, rather than discourage, assistance.

Finally, the lack of well-planned volunteer activities in our city parks hinders the expansion of volunteers in our parks. This deficiency is directly linked to the parallel lack of well-planned staff activities: we still have no detailed work plans for our parks that delineate what staff and volunteers are responsible for achieving. Equally important, there seems to be no paper trail or supervisory process to check staff or volunteer results. Many 'friends of' groups continue to be frustrated by the lack of planning for their park efforts or the very obvious substitution of their labor for the regular tasks that should be done by the staff scheduled and assigned to the park. Volunteers want and need to be more than drones with a 'make work' assignment in a park. San Francisco can and must harness this amazing resource if we ever hope to achieve the high quality parks that people wish to have in our 'world class' city.

Revitalizing Communities, Park by Park

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SECOND AND THIRD QUARTER 2008

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