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PARKS REPORT #46 SUMMER 2009

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LEADERSHIP CHANGE AT NPC

Isabel Wade, founder of the Neighborhood Parks Council, will step down as Executive Director on July 1st. She will continue to help NPC as a member of the Board of Directors and may assist on special projects in the future. She plans to spend the summer gardening and taking a few camping trips with her family. According to Isabel, "I need a rest and a recharge, but in the era of climate change, I don't expect to be sitting around doing nothing for long." NPC will honor Isabel at our annual fall Gala on September 11th at the Fort Mason Officer's Club. Please plan to attend and celebrate her vision and passionate work of the last 14 years.

Deputy Director **Meredith Thomas** will take over the Executive Director position from Isabel. "Stepping in to help meet the needs of our neighborhood parks alongside NPC's coalition is an honor. San Francisco is the most beautiful city in the world because of its parks — this makes running NPC a dream job."

Prior to joining NPC in 2007, Meredith worked as a Program Associate at the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council, and as the Communications and Development Coordinator with the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association. She spent more than seventeen years at the San Francisco Zoo, starting as a teen volunteer, then as an intern and staff member. Meredith holds a BS in Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology from UC Davis, and a MA in Environmental Business Relations from SF State University.



Corona Heights Park

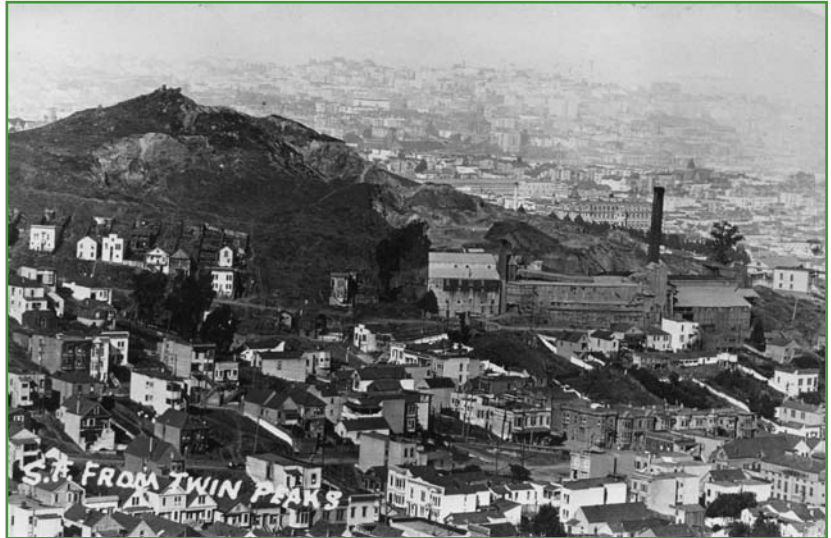
— Jeanne Alexander

It's been known as Rocky Hill, San Francisco's Secret Park (by writer Margot Patterson Doss) and the Fist (from the upthrusting chert rock boulders at its 540 ft. peak). In the 1800s, Rocky Hill was the site of a quarry and brick factory owned by the Gray Brothers. George and Harry Gray also owned an infamous reputation for substandard production, non-payment of their workers, and injuries to people from falling rocks. One of the brothers was killed by an unpaid worker in 1915 and the quarrying ended in the 1920s. But the streets winding down the hill from the kilns endured, and their spectacular views turned them into prime real estate sites. People bought them and built homes that touch on the Haight- Ashbury, Castro, and Corona Heights neighborhoods.

In 1928, Josephine Randall, the Recreation Superintendent of San Francisco, proposed that the City buy the 16 acres of Rocky Hill for recreation, and in 1941, it was purchased for \$27,333 and officially named Corona Heights. Designated as a natural area, the Park hosts a range of native and non-local life and plants — lizards, garter snakes, raccoons, opossum, grasses, wildflowers, birds and butterflies. It also hosts the Randall Museum, named for the woman who relentlessly and successfully fought to establish it.

The Museum opened in 1951 at 199 Museum Way and in succeeding years has developed into a community institution for all ages. Focusing on the culture and environment of the San Francisco Bay Area, it offers arts and sciences classes, a California native animals room, and workshops for children, teens and families. The Randall Theater's program presents performances by the Young People's Teen Musical Theater and Musical Theater Works, a student theater. Community groups use the facilities for meetings and lectures. At the Outdoor Learning Environment are Learning Gardens, the Native Plant Garden, and from the observation deck, a panoramic view of San Francisco, the Bay, East Bay hills, and, when the air is clear, the snowcapped Sierra. www.randallmuseum.org.

Visitors exploring Corona Heights Park will discover a children's playground, a nursery school, a community garden, and a fenced, off-leash park for dogs. They'll marvel at its famous "Slick'n'Slides" —the 60-foot high sheer rock wall, looking in some places, as though it had been polished by a jeweler. Uphill toward the peak and down from it, walkers will corkscrew around hills and find pockets holding barbecue pits, tennis courts, and breathtaking views. Just below the peak, the flat lawn with picnic tables offers picnickers a spectacular view, and a risk that winds, sometimes extreme, will whisk their cups and plates out into it.



CORONA HEIGHTS WITH HOLLOWED OUT SITE OF FORMER BRICK FACTORY. CIRCA 1910.

A risk to the peak itself was reported by the press in 1961. "Corona Heights To Bite the Dust?" asked the San Francisco Examiner, reporting that it was to be declared surplus property by the Recreation and Park Department and offered for sale by the city. Denying the rumor, Rec and Park's superintendent of recreation said that acquiring funds to develop the 16-acre hilltop, was "unfeasible" and that the department had given up the idea.

Corona Heights had a brief encounter with homeless camps two years ago. In October 2007, on the hill behind the nursery school, thick brush hid encampments and piles of trash, syringes and broken bottles. Park officials, police officers, public works crews, and a team of goats who ate the brush, collaborated to clean up the grounds. Neighborhood residents of the informal Corona Heights Association pick up trash on their walks in the Park but it still lacks the attention of an organized Friends group. Anyone interested in exploring the idea should contact msilva@sfnpc.org.

Josephine Randall's dream of "a spot in the heart of the city where people could spend a day in the country" came true in Corona Heights. People have been spending such days there for almost 70 years. And hikers, on their way to the top, are equipped with the mantra from Margot Patterson Doss, "Climb to the crest only if you are fit."

Location: Roosevelt and Museum Way
 Bus: #37 to Roosevelt & Museum Way
 Contact: Matt Silva, msilva@sfnpc.org

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



Parks in the News

NPC Welcomes Three New Board Members

We are pleased to announce three new appointments to our Board of Directors: **Kelly Quirke**, former Executive Director of Friends of the Urban Forest, Wachovia Bank Vice President/Market Compliance Specialist **Greg Syler**, and **Alfredo Pedroza**, District 9 Liaison in the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services (and former NPC staffer!) To read more about them, visit <http://www.sfnpc.org/board>

New Partners Help ParkScan Expand Service

A new partnership between ParkScan and 311 was announced in May. Now all ParkScan observations are linked into the 311 system, allowing city residents to report park issues by phone or web 24/7. Connection to 311 adds a new level of accountability, as 311 staff follow up on every call or complaint to ensure a resolution from RPD or other responsible agency.

NPC also launched its first national ParkScan website for the City of Portland, OR in May. The site (<http://www.parkscanpdx.org>) was tailored for the specific needs of that city, but maintains the features that have made it such a success in San Francisco.

Sharp Park to go "Native"?

Thanks to more than 300 folks who showed their support for the restoration of Sharp Park Golf Course as a natural area at a City Hall hearing in April, the legislation, initially proposed by Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, was passed by the full board

on May 5th with minor amendments. The park, presently under the jurisdiction of RPD, may be transferred to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, or jointly managed. It would also be restored as a habitat for two federally-listed endangered species (the San Francisco garter snake and the California red-legged frog) and, after an assessment of recreational alternatives, could be redesigned to diversify recreational opportunities.

Visit <http://www.sfnpc.org/restoresharpparkaction> for updates.

Annual Meeting With the Mayor Sets Park Priorities

NPC held a lively and productive annual coalition meeting with **Mayor Newsom** on June 2nd. NPC chronicled improvements in management under interim General Manager **Jared Blumenfeld**; representatives from a number of park groups presented their current issues of greatest concern. A farewell reception followed the meeting, and everyone toasted NPC's founding Executive Director **Isabel Wade**, who will be moving on to new adventures on July 1.

Playground Initiative Update

At Play Day 2009 in March, NPC launched Phase 2 of the Playground Initiative. The event, held at McCoppin Square Playground, was made possible by volunteers from Ricoh Corporation, who sifted sand and repainted play structures. Thanks also to **Pat Dimmick** of Friends of San Francisco Public Library, who led story time for the kids, and to our sponsors, Honest Tea, and Safeway, for donating food and refreshments. NPC looks forward to co-hosting several more workdays with RPD to improve grades at failed playgrounds in the summer and fall.

Mission kids now have a fantastic new place to play: the remodeled Franklin Square Playground! The **Friends of Franklin Square** advocated tirelessly over the last three years and raised funds to move this project from a vision to reality. The new playground, open since May, features a climbing structure for older kids, two swing sets, and reptilian rocks for children to "scale". The most playful spot in the Mission is now at 17th Street and Bryant!

The Friends of Dolores Park Playground were lauded in a recent Chronicle article, which praised their renovation project as a "city-wide model." In April, the Park Commission approved \$1.5M in bond funds for the outdated playground, to match a private grant in honor of **Helen Diller**. The design process wrapped up at the third community meeting in May. Meanwhile, the Friends are activating the present space with free bi-monthly musical programs for the kiddies. Stay tuned for information about groundbreaking!



PLAY DAY 2009 AT MCCOPPIN SQUARE. PHOTO BY NPC STAFF



Changing Times Require New Open Space Strategies

— Isabel Wade, Executive Director

The more things change, the more they stay the same . . . Or do they, in the world of open space? Twenty-three years after the creation of ROSE, the Recreation and Open Space Element in the City's General Plan, the Planning Department is currently updating its policies and ascertaining the public's priorities for a greener city. In a series of 29 Community Open Space Workshops held since December, and through an online survey (www.openspacesf.org/survey), hundreds of residents across the city have been weighing in.

Not surprisingly, neighborhoods without parks or playgrounds still consider open space acquisition to be a paramount priority. Yet obtaining new land in San Francisco is even more challenging today. What are the options?

Looking beyond vacant land, balconies, or rooftops as a means to create new open space is a radical idea. Yet the current economic crisis, and resulting decline in property values represents a rare opportunity to fill open space gaps in our densely developed city. The strategy is to look for sites where a park or recreation facility is needed—regardless of existing structures. If the price is right, let's help every neighborhood get the play spaces they need. Two successful examples of parks created on former residential sites are Seattle's Homer Park, and Rutledge Park in Victoria, BC.

Other signs of changing times were expressed at the Open Space Workshops through creative ideas regarding the function and form of city parks today. For example, many participants wanted to increase food production in parks (parks have historically been sites of food production, such as WWII Victory Gardens.) They also saw "green streets" connecting to parks as opportunities to improve the pedestrian experience in neighborhoods and to serve as habitat corridors for wildlife.

New awareness expressed at the workshops that well-designed park activities can contribute toward the realization of many City goals — improving health, reducing obesity, creating neighborhood destinations that contribute to economic development — emphasizes the changing role of parks in society today. However, most workshop participants felt that these important public policy goals (outlined in City initiatives such as Shape Up SF, and the SF Economic



SOMA RESIDENTS IN GROUP DISCUSSION ABOUT OPEN SPACE. PHOTO: NPC STAFF.

Development Plan) were not well reflected in the planning of the Recreation and Park Department or in the policies of the Commission. Greater coordination among city agencies with parallel goals was highlighted many times as a top priority.

Workshop participants also consistently noted that improving our existing parks and building community stewardship around them was the most effective way to create thriving parks. Most parks would obviously benefit from volunteer labor, and collective efforts greatly contribute to volunteers' sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their parks. However, participants expressed serious frustration with bureaucratic roadblocks to community fundraising and sweat equity which hinder simple park improvements and volunteer activities.

Dedicated open space in every neighborhood, together with community stewardship, is critical to the success of San Francisco's current and future park system. Let's not forget either as we plan for the future of the City's open spaces.

To ensure our City's open space policies have all the teeth they need to achieve their goals, please review the Draft Recreation and Open Space Element, which can be found at <http://openspace.sfplanning.org>. Then share your ideas and comments with the City Planning Department: Claudia.Flores@sfgov.org.