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Parkside Square Opens with Great Fanfare

Cutting-edge Facility is More Than Handicap Compliant



photo: Glenn Gullmes

Hundreds of people attended the opening of the Parkside Square Playground Feb. 7, including new Supervisor Michela Alioto-Pier.

By Peter Sciacca

When a ribbon was cut at Parkside Square Feb. 7, it was more than the opening of a playground. It was also the introduction of the first handicapped-accessible playground in San Francisco.

"The design is perfect," said Barbara Figoni-Hogan, whose daughter has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. "I can just drive up to it and we can go right in without any hassles."

Children with limited mobility can access any of the play structures, which are open to all children.

"Kids in wheelchairs can go right up to them without getting stuck in sand," Figoni-Hogan said.

Figoni-Hogan also brings her other child, who is not disabled, to the park.

"Both of my kids can play together there," she said. "They have such a great time. There's something for both of them."

Figoni-Hogan's daughter, Angelica, cut the ribbon to the park with former mayor Willie Brown at the February ceremony. Brown was representing SF Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Other city officials who attended the ceremony were Police Chief Heather Fong, SF supervisors Fiona Ma and Michela Alioto-Pier and Fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White. Figoni-Hogan's sister-in-law, Denise Rago-Figoni, also attended the event. She helped spearhead the effort to have the park built.

"My friends were also there with their kids," Figoni-Hogan said. "It was such a warm and happy event.

"Everyone was really pleased with how this playground turned out."

Work began in May, 2003 on the \$991,600 project. The new, 21,000-square-foot playground replaces a

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12,000-square-foot playground that was built in 1983.

Parkside Square is located at Vicente Street and 28th Avenue, next to Stern Grove.

"We wanted an interesting playground with more space," said Judy Mosqueda, the SF Department of Public Works' project manager.

The playground incorporates a structure in the shape of a ship and a "geo dome" for children to go into and climb on. A unique feature is the facility's water play table, a concrete structure with a spigot that shoots water down a series of channels that drain into sand.

"Water play tables are popular in other parts of the Bay Area but there aren't too many in San Francisco," Mosqueda said. "For a long time people have complained that it is too cold in the City for these play structures. However, kids enjoy playing with them and aren't bothered by the water."

The playground also has spring toys for children to rock back and forth on and a full complement of belt, bucket and tire swings. To meet current safety regulations, there is greater spacing between play structures than there was with the previous playground.

The project is part of the SF Recreation and Park Department's Capital Improvement Program. Projects done through the program are funded by bond measure Proposition A, which was approved by city voters in 2000.

Parkside Square's other features include a basketball court, tennis courts and a large grass field that includes a baseball diamond used by several baseball and softball leagues. A tai chi group practices its routines at the tennis courts year-round.