

# THE NEIGHBORHOOD

NOE/HAIGHT/CENTRAL EDITION

S.F. Independent

p15

TUESDAY, JULY 30, 1996

## It's playtime in the Panhandle

### PANHANDLE

### Saturn Corporation volunteers renovate old playground

BY KAREN POJMANN  
Neighborhood Correspondent

Wanna play?

You might want to visit the Panhandle, where volunteers erected a new playground last week.

"It's the best thing that's ever happened in this park," said resident Nicole Ix, whose children play in the Panhandle.

The new equipment conforms to current safety guidelines and Americans with Disabilities Act regulations, which were not met by the nearly 30-year-old previous playground, torn down earlier this month. The Panhandle was last on the Department of Recreation and Park's list of city playgrounds to be rebuilt until the Saturn Corporation offered funding and volunteers to upgrade it to modern standards.

New safety guidelines require more space between pieces of equipment, a condition hard to meet in urban settings, said Deborah Learner of Rec and Park, which installed pads and rubber matting to make the playground usable for children with disabilities.

"When we retrofit our playgrounds, often we end up with less equipment because they used to jam things in a lot more," Learner said. She hopes Rec and Park can eventually add an area for swings.

#### Purple triple slide

Smaller or not, the new playground offers great fun.

Highlights include a purple triple slide, climbing areas, a modern incarnation of monkey bars called the "skygame," and, for toddlers, a low tire swing and sand. One fancy feature is a cooperation-based game in which a child can ride a gondola across a bar propelled by a second child turning a spindle.

"Kids like the unexpected, a surprise," said Margaret Brown of Kompan California, Inc., the company that designed the playground.

#### Safety concerns

But playing in the Panhandle isn't always fun and games. Some

residents complain of litter, dog feces, and drug dealing in the park.

"My concern is people who choose to do their drugs in the playground," said Erica, a Panhandle-area resident and mother who sometimes found needles in sand at the old playground.

"This is a fresh start," she said of the newly poured sand.

Learner said area community groups work with the police to try to push drug dealing out of the Panhandle.

"There has been a public spirit, and we hope that the playground will generate more interest and more participation," Learner said.

#### Anyone can do it

At the playground site, volunteers from Saturn and community groups such as the Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Council and the Cole Valley Improvement Association were organized into

See **PLAYGROUND**, page 17



PHOTO: JUDI PARKS

**PLAYGROUND WITH A TWIST:** Employees of the Saturn Corporation gathered in the panhandle last week to build a new playground. The playground conforms to current safety guidelines and Americans with Disability Act regulations.

HAIGHT ASHBURY VF

# PLAYGROUND: Safer

*continued from page 15*

---

supervised groups and assigned tasks from construction to sand-shoveling. Brown said she likes volunteer builds, which require only willingness and basic home-improvement skills, because anyone can participate.

---

"Building a playground is not rocket science," she said.

Mayor Willie Brown turned out for a ceremonial ribbon-cutting and dedication of the new playground. He said he hopes to encourage more corporations to fund public park and playground improvements.

---