

Worth the Wait: Flood Park's New Design Honors Community Needs and Desires

By Michele Beasley

For several years, the Parks Foundation talked up Memorial Park which turned 100 last year and was the very first San Mateo County Park. Well, the very second San Mateo County Park, Flood Park, opened in 1937, and has also been the recipient of some much needed and very impressive improvements.

After years of community engagement, planning and now construction, the majority of Flood Park is open to visitors. Shiny new amenities include reservable picnic areas, basketball, pickleball and sand volleyball courts, and multiuse playing fields. Pathways weave throughout the park, taking one past playing fields and then amongst heritage trees such as coast live oak, coast redwood, and California bay laurel.

One of the first new amenities to go in, the pump track, located under towering redwood trees, remains the most popular feature in the park. Still to come: an accessible playground named "Boulder Canyon," a design chosen by the community for its natural aesthetics which will allow it to blend in with the park's landscape.

The Youth Voice

When I joined the Parks Foundation in November 2015, one of the first things I attended was a Flood Park community meeting. A good chunk of those in attendance were youth — kids



Madrone picnic area at Flood Park, photo by Rob Cala.

in middle school and junior high. They were speaking up for the elements they wanted to see in the park — soccer fields and a pump track. Their poise, knowledge, and communication skills were exceptional. Ten years later, those elements are in and some of those kids, now young adults, have returned to see and experience the fruit of their labor.

"If my friends and I were able to put our hearts and souls into something so important to us and it happened, I can only imagine what else we can do." This empowering statement came from Juventino who as a youth advocated for the pump track. He is now a Youth Mentor at the

Redwood City Pal Center, and was one of the first to try out the new pump track eight years after his advocacy.

In 2019, I attended a lively Board of Supervisors hearing on various elements and concerns of the landscape plan. Most public comments came from youth who lived in North Fair Oaks and had little to no access to parks and playing fields. North Fair Oaks is an unincorporated county pocket and residents do not have priority on fields in Redwood City or Menlo Park. Everest High School, in North Fair Oaks, has a soccer team but no field and most kids end up playing on concrete.

It was at this meeting that I heard Destiny, then age 14, say as part of her public comment, *"I forget all of my problems when I play soccer."* Now 20, Destiny, who attends college on the East Coast, returned for the Flood Park ribbon cutting held just this past June.

"I was very excited to be able to step out onto a field from home and have the chance to play soccer again. My younger siblings will benefit immensely from the new park and I truly feel that the community has done an amazing job serving the younger and older generations."

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San Mateo County Parks

Cowell – Purisima Trail
Coyote Point Recreation Area
Crystal Springs Regional Trail
San Andreas Segment
Sawyer Camp Segment
Edgewood Park & Preserve
Devil's Slide Trail
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve
Pillar Point Bluff
Flood Park
Friendship Park
Junipero Serra Park
Huddart Park
Memorial Park
Pescadero Creek Park
Sam McDonald Park
Heritage Grove
Mirada Surf
Moss Beach Park
Quarry Park
San Bruno Mountain Park
Sanchez Adobe
San Pedro Valley Park
Tunitas Creek Beach
Woodside Store
Wunderlich Park

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Contact information

San Mateo County Parks Foundation

1701 Coyote Point Drive,
San Mateo, CA 94401
650/321-5812 voice
info@supportparks.org
www.supportparks.org



Drop-In picnic area near multi-use playing field, photo by Rob Cala.

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Just this past weekend I was at Flood Park and I appreciated how much the park had to offer. My friends and I used a grill, played at the volleyball courts, and ended the night with a great game of soccer. I cannot say just how grateful I am to experience this now but also for the many generations to come."

"The Park is Alive Again!"

The mood at the June 7 ribbon cutting was one of jubilation. The San Mateo County Parks Department did a great job of listening to the community, understanding all concerns, and adjusting the plan to ensure the protection of heritage trees while adding necessary playing fields and courts. *"The park is alive again!"* This from Carla Schoof, Communications Manager for County Parks and an integral part of the planning process from its inception. *"What was wonderful about the process was having so many people involved — especially youth — with different experiences and dreams and wants weighing in on the design."*

Neighbors who paid close attention during the planning process are also very pleased with the results.

"We have enjoyed living adjacent to Flood Park on Del Norte Avenue for 38 years," shared Alice Newton. "We, our children, and now also our grandchildren love this beautiful, woody park. The new layout and amenities are terrific! The big old trees are treasures, and newly planted ones are nice. Old logs and native plants add to the natural atmosphere. The pump track, pickleball, and sand volleyball are popular, and we are glad to see groups returning to the picnic sites. Bottom line is Thank You!"

There has been a regional deficit of playing fields in San Mateo County for many years. Multi-purpose fields that can accommodate soc-



Aerial view of tennis, pickleball and basketball courts, photo by Rob Cala.

cer, baseball, lacrosse, football, cricket etc. are in high demand. *"Safe and fun places for families and youth to gather outside and play are needed, especially as outdoor family entertainment centers disappear from the Bay Area and housing density grows,"* says San Mateo County Parks Director Nicholas Calderon. This is why parks are so special. They belong to all of us. Homes and jobs are not enough for a thriving region. We need places for youth. We need parks and playing fields.

A Recreation Destination for Everyone

Flood Park has a very different feel from other county parks. It has always been more of a recreation destination than open space. Flood Park's main feature for many years was a 180,000 gallon, unheated, sixty by one-hundred-foot pool, built in the 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s, Flood Park was one of the most popular recreation spots in south San Mateo County. There could be up to 200 people splashing in the pool at any given time and as many as 60,000 visitors each summer. The pool was removed in the 1970s, but Flood Park remained a popular place for all kinds of events.

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Meet Cristina Vila Ruiz Who Now Marks One Year with the Parks Foundation!

Cristina is a bilingual educator and environmental advocate originally from Puerto Rico. She holds a master's degree in Environmental Science and has always been passionate about connecting people to nature.

Cristina moved to the Bay Area eight years ago and began working in environmental education. Her passion for nature led her to join a nonprofit focused on creating gardens in low-income neighborhoods across San Francisco. These spaces provided access to fresh, healthy produce while offering a chance to enjoy the outdoors for communities with limited exposure to nature. Through this work, Cristina shared her love of gardening, environmental stewardship, and the outdoors with children of all ages. She then spent two summers working at Hidden Villa and Tree Frog Treks where she led outdoor camp activities. Cristina has consistently created inclusive and meaningful connections to nature.

Her connection to San Mateo County Parks

began with an internship as a bilingual park interpreter—an experience that deepened her love for public lands and community-based programs. It allowed her to continue with her love of gardening by supporting the gardeners at Friendship Park, located in North Fair Oaks. That role, funded by the Parks Foundation where she now works, provided her with opportunities to build relationships with local organizations and engage with communities throughout the county.

Today, as Program Coordinator for the San Mateo County Parks Foundation, Cristina brings her experience in education, outreach, and environmental stewardship to help bridge communities with the parks and support outdoor programming. She is especially excited to combine her professional and personal worlds as a new mom. Inspired by her parenting adventure, she created and now leads a monthly Parents and Babies Meet-Up at Coyote Point. This new event series is designed to build com-



Program Coordinator for San Mateo County Parks Foundation Cristina Vila Ruiz with her baby Franco.

munity among parents while giving babies the chance to enjoy fresh air, open spaces, and the calming beauty of nature.

For more information, email her at Cristina@SupportParks.org, or just say "Hi!" if you see her out on the trails with her baby Franco!



Conceptual Drawing of East Entry into Playground, image credit: CMG.

In the 1980s, inspired by Menlo Park resident Phyllis Cangemi, Flood Park became one of the world's first public parks to welcome people with disabilities, adding accessible swings, restrooms, water fountains, and more. The playground was advanced for its time, but several decades later it was clear that a completely new playground was needed — one that will continue to offer the community the most accessible recreation possible including swing banks with accessible swings and an accessible seat on the zip line.

Director Calderon highlighted that, "While

hiking trails and camping are in our DNA, Flood Park also reflects our history and the ongoing goal to meet the evolving needs of San Mateo County residents and visitors. The new design and facilities at Flood Park reflect what we heard from the community, including local youth, and parents of children with special needs."

Flood Park is a neighborhood gem with a regional reach. It shows that when community members and the county work well together, the result can be an exceptional design that has many people feeling grateful. It was well worth the wait.

12" x 12"

\$1,000

12" x 12"

\$1,000

Support Flood Park into the Future

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is selling commemorative pavers that will be installed at the entrance to the new playground. All funds raised will help complete finishing touches and be used to maintain park amenities at Flood Park into the future. A personalized engraved brick is a wonderful way to honor a loved one, your children or show your support for parks in general! All donations are 100% tax-deductible.

SCAN TO ORDER A PERSONALIZED FLOOD PARK PAVER

Finding Home Among the Redwoods

This summer we supported five groups with camping trips to Memorial Park: Familias Unidas, The Latchkey Alternative Center, Redwood City Together, Boys and Girls Club of the Coastside and Casa Circulo Cultural. Enjoy these photos from the Latchkey Alternative Center, which is based in Daly City. Everyone had a good time and the connections made under these towering trees will last long after they returned home.



Altogether Now!



Learning to set up a tent for the first time.



Anytime is a good time for ice cream.



Just hanging out.



Everyone helps out.



Roasting marshmallows by the campfire was a favorite past-time.



Camp-made boat race at Pescadero Creek.



Glowing tents at night.



"We love the redwoods!"

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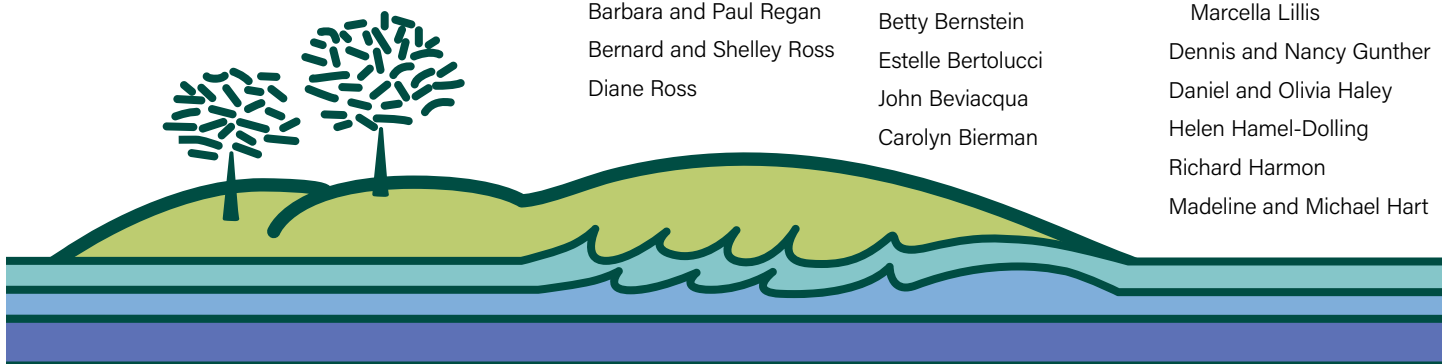
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Test Your Flower Knowledge!

by Leslie Holzman, Membership and Communications Coordinator

Identify the plant species described here and then check your answers at the bottom



1

Nina Bell, Huddart Park

This plant gets its name from its unpleasant odor but this smell actually serves a purpose — it attracts flies and beetles for pollination instead of bees or butterflies.



6

Michelle Viegas, Edgewood Preserve

Despite its name, this is a member of the iris family. Individual flowers only last one day but are produced in great numbers.



2

Stephen Johnson, Sam McDonald Park

These stunners can grow up to 8 feet tall and the recurved petals give it a distinctive "Turk's cap" appearance.



7

Scot Rohrer, Edgewood Preserve

The petals give this plant its charming common name. Growing on serpentine soils that are deficient in essential nutrients, this tiny plant has adapted to survive conditions most plants can't tolerate.



3

Cameron Partridge, San Bruno Mountain

From a family of bulbs that were eaten by Native Americans (though some species are toxic), this plant has a pattern on its petals that looks almost like a chess board.



8

Suzanne Coberly, Edgewood Preserve

The white-tipped yellow petals look like they have been dipped in paint, suggesting its name.



4

Christine Chang at Edgewood Preserve

This plant earned its name during the California Gold Rush when miners ate it to prevent scurvy due to its high vitamin C content.



9

Vitaly Lavrukhin, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

Despite the beautiful range of its colors — from deep purple to white to yellow — this is regarded as a noxious weed in pastures, because it forms clumps that inhibit other vegetation, and its leaves are bitter and unpalatable to cattle.



5

Kaushal Parekh, Edgewood Preserve

These produce bright red berries that are edible but taste terrible — they are sometimes called "scurvy berries." It's look-alike plant however, has poisonous berries.



10

Cameron Partridge, San Bruno Mountain

This plant produces small blue flowers that eventually develop into seeds covered in tiny hooks — nature's Velcro that sticks to passing animals for dispersal.

1. Fetid Adder's Tongue, 2. California Tiger Lily, 3. Checker Lily, 4. Miner's Lettuce, 5. False Solomon's Seal, 6. Blue-Eyed Grass, 7. Purple Mouse Ears (Brownies), 8. Common Tidy Tips, 9. Douglas Iris, 10. Pacific Hound's Tongue