

When will Boeddeker be safe for kids?

BY TOM CARTER

HAVING shaken off its dark ages, Boeddeker Park is blossoming under plenty of attention these days but still can't kick its worst habit—drug dealers—despite being across from the police station.

"Boeddeker is infamous for prison-based drug gangs that center around the domino playing area they use as a cover," says Dan Stein, a team member of ParkScan who pauses during the February examination of the site to talk about the park.

"It used to be called the Hall of Shame but we've come beyond that now," he adds. "It's a beautiful park now. But it won't be 100% until the kids come back."

"The kids" are the 40 kindergartners and first-graders from the San Francisco Christian Academy at 230 Jones St. A year ago, the academy stopped bringing them across the street to the park playground.

The park, which opened in 1985, was designed for safety but was cut off from streets by fences and walls. Inside, activity areas were segregated as "open rooms." The walk through the middle of the park became the territory of drug dealers known as "The Gauntlet." A parade of unsteady characters traveled it from the Eddy and Jones entrance to reach Glide church on Ellis. Public urination, defecation and drug use were common.

"And the noise level was unbearable," says Stein, a ParkScan volunteer who lives at Presentation Community Senior Housing adjacent to the park at 301 Ellis. But the dark period ended, he says, when the Tenderloin police contingent moved out of the Hibernia Bank

building and into its new station at 301 Eddy at Jones in 2000.

Even so, a gray area developed because drugs had hardly dried up. The school sent kids to Boeddeker playground for three years because the park accommodated them by closing the rest of the park from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. But a year ago, Boeddeker stopped closing because of complaints and the school changed its mind.

"It was because of the hazardous conditions, the drug dealing and the syringes we found on the playground," says Dina Hilliard, K-1 teacher. "It was too dangerous. Adults were selling while we were there."

Now Hilliard takes the kids to the Tenderloin Children's Park at Ellis and Hyde 10 minutes away where there is no discernible drug traffic.

"We would love to use (Boeddeker) again," Hilliard says. "But we don't feel it is safe."

Boeddeker's Rec and Park senior director Robert McDaniels says he wants the kids back and dreams that one day tourists will come to take pictures of "basketball and skateboard tournaments."

Six months ago, in a move supported by police, the park permanently locked its north gate, effectively ending the stream of traffic to Glide. And three months ago, the park enjoyed its greatest peace, McDaniels says, when all board games were outlawed, including the favorite, dominoes. The drug scene dissolved.

"But there was a glitch in the rules and we couldn't (ban) all (board games)," he says. "So the dealers came back. We are making signs right now for no domino playing."

Now, too, the park physically has never appeared better. Staff and a growing number of volunteers, including the 1-year-old Friends of Boeddeker Park, keep a constant eye on the place. (see sidebar) Tidy patches of garden burst with greenery and flowers, an upbeat Stein attributes to new gardener Thomas Wang. And any physical problems found by ParkScan or staff are usually handled in a timely manner, Boeddeker's Rec and Park directors say.

ParkScan is a \$450,000 Alfred P. Sloan grant-funded pilot landed by the Neighborhood Parks Council designed to improve city parks. The project that started in October operates in 14 city parks and is expected to be extended to four years. Trained volunteers use hand computers and a digital camera to document their findings as they examine everything in the park from smelly drains to statuary. (In January, ParkScan found and reported five dead pigeons in a patch of Boeddeker garden that were removed the same day.)

ParkScan results are sent electronically the day of inspection to Rec and Park before they are posted on the Internet (www.sfnighborhoodparks.org). Rec and Park

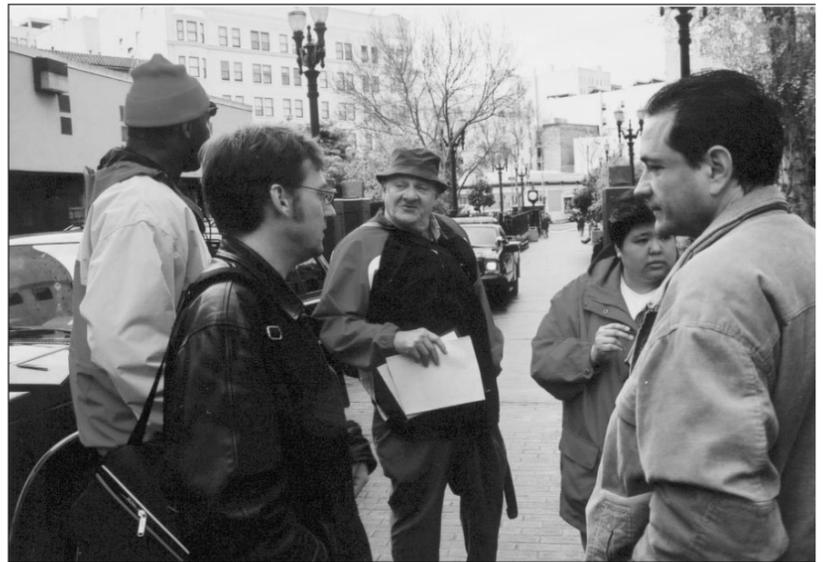


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and the Department of Public Works take corrective action and are quick to deal with graffiti and trash.

"I think Boeddeker has been doing very well," says Sam Shaw, ParkScan's technology trainer who accompanies inspections. "There's great energy in the park."

Despite its ongoing cleanup efforts, the park still can't tame behavior. The day of the ParkScan inspection, a man urinated on the curb outside the north gate and at 10 a.m. someone was arrested for smoking crack in the park bathroom.

"I hope in a year we'll all be able to sit down in a peaceful park," Stein says. ■

ACTION AT BOEDDEKER: PAINTING AND OTHER SPRUCING UP SOON

Boeddeker Park will get some fresh make-up when volunteers from Friends of Rec and Park come for a work visit, Saturday, March 13, starting at 8 a.m., going to 2-3 p.m. David Hatfield, head of volunteers, told a meeting of the Friends of Boeddeker Park that among the jobs to make the to-do list is painting part of the community house and touching up some outdoor benches. He's still looking for more helping hands, so call him at 750-5224. Also, Tod Thorpe, volunteer coordinator for Glide Memorial, announced that he is applying for the park to receive a May 8 visit from Hands on San Francisco. Another volunteer group, Hands On is a nonprofit with carpenters and electricians who can make changes authorized by Rec and Park. ■

ParkScan volunteer Dan Stein (center) is flanked by (left) Boeddeker park director Robert McDaniels and ParkScan trainer Sam Shaw and (right) team members Abelle Cochico and Jose Vega. Far left, the ParkScan team put rusting garbage can lids on its "unsatisfactory" February list. The month before, they found five dead pigeons.



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