

Park's new caretakers weed, plant, have fun

PHOTOS: MARJORIE BEGGS

Earth Day, April 22 — Twenty adults and kids put on gloves and honored old sod by becoming charter members of Boeddeker Park's stewardship program.

From 3 to 4:30 p.m., they weeded and hoed, raked and spaded in the park area designated as a community garden, preparing the soil for planting on April 26. The day was hot, but regular cooling afternoon breezes at this far end of the park kept everyone comfortable.

The volunteer program is an attempt by the park's staff and advisory committee to ensure that Boeddeker looks great year-round but, more important, that the community feels it has a stake in the park's appearance and upkeep.

The stewardship program will operate two afternoons a week, hopefully with a cadre of regulars — adults on Mondays, kids on Fridays. The work hours may shift, once the program settles in. And this first week, adults and kids mixed it up together.

Jackie Jenks, Hospitality House executive director, talked up the park program with her drop-in center's clients, staff and volunteers. Fifteen of them walked with her over to Boeddeker and signed up as official stewards of the park. (The four kids at the launch, who live in the neighborhood, came over from the playground to help out.)

Jenks introduced her crew to park staff — Boeddeker Park Director Greg Johnwell



Connie Latch gives a young volunteer in the park stewardship program lessons in weeding.

and gardener Sandra Choate — and ran down the rules: Check in with Greg when you come to work, check out the tools with him, and no smoking, alcohol or profanity.

"We expect courtesy and want you to be respectful of this project, just like you are at Hospitality House," Jenks told them, "and we want you to have fun, too."

Johnwell welcomed all the volunteers and emphasized how important they were: "It takes someone to start something like this, and if it works, more people will sign up to help. I've been looking forward to this for a long, long time — I really appreciate you showing up."

BOEDDEKER BLOOMING

Marjorie Beggs

Choate ran down the safety rules. "Always wear gloves — we have both leather and latex and I think you should wear both. And always look before you put your hand into a weed to pull it out."

The adults nodded, acknowledging the sad fact that drug dealing and its paraphernalia still bedevil Boeddeker. Later, in a phone interview, Choate said: "Boed-

deker's not a pin cushion, but we still have to stay alert."

If this program works, it will be a coup for the park's supporters and also will please SLUG (San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners), which has been trying

to complete a community garden project that started here several years ago.

Three days later, Tenderloin Children's Playground and Recreation Center Co-Director Diana Chin brought nine of her kids to finish the weeding and to plant sunflower, moonflower, nasturtium and various herb seeds in planting flats. All germinate at different speeds, but Choate hopes that

the nasturtium seedlings, for example, might be ready to transplant into the garden beds by mid-May.

At the top of the park, a few adults who stopped by to help planted gallon containers of blooming lavender, artemisia, gold alyssum, santolina ("a smelly shrub," Choate said) and more.

On successive Fridays, kids will come over from the Boys and Girls Club, the Tenderloin After-School Program across from the park, and other youth groups. Besides having the young gardeners help with upkeep, Choate plans to have them start a compost heap, learn about beneficial weeds and go on a bug hunt, the better to learn about the environment of their garden. ■



"I used to be afraid to come to this park, but this is nice," said a Hospitality House Self-Help Center client as he cleared weeds.

Collaborative SLUGging it out over the park

Marjorie Beggs

The bloom has long been off the rose at Boeddeker Park, according to several Tenderloin Futures Collaborative members. For months, Park Advisory Committee members and a Rec and Park supervisor have been trying to find out why the S.F. League of Urban Gardeners hasn't finished what it started more than a year ago — building a community garden in the park's upper tier.

At the December Collaborative meeting, park advisory member Connie Latch said SLUG's work was ineffective and had left the park "a travesty, unusable" (see *Extra* No. 10).

By April, nothing had changed at the park, so SLUG landscape architect Steven Patton and David Lee Crosby, who coordinates the organization's education and youth programs, came to the April 10 Collaborative meeting to try to get the project moving again and smooth some ruffled feathers.

SLUG received two grants to make Boeddeker the jewel of the Tenderloin: a \$40,000 block grant from the Mayor's Office of Community Development

for the project's first phase, and a \$30,000 grant from Rec and Park for phase two.

The *Extra* contacted SLUG Executive Director Cory Calandra to verify how the \$40,000 was spent. He said they built raised planting boxes, seating areas and other planting areas in the upper park. A good portion also went to community planning meetings and meetings with architects and with Rec and Park to create a master plan for the lower park — "lots of planning time," Calandra said.

Phase two is just starting now, she said. The \$30,000 will pay for more planning, community outreach by SLUG staff and building more planter boxes in the upper garden.

Patton said there had been a lot of "misunderstanding and miscommunication" with the community about the phased work schedule. He wanted to "regenerate community interest in the park." He felt the work had to start almost immediately because the grant was good only until June 30.

Many at the meeting worried that if the money wasn't spent, it could be kissed good-bye.

Why not just start the work?

the SLUGgers were asked. "We need a green light from Rec and Park," Crosby said.

"But how can you just build a park if you don't have community?" asked Gloria Koch-Gonzalez, Tenderloin Area supervisor for Rec and Park. "You have to develop the community first." Which hatched another chicken-and-egg examination.

Collaborative Chairwoman, the Rev. Glenda Hope, finally sent the involved parties out of the meeting room with a directive: "Set a time to be together at the park so the rest of us can recruit people for a specific time. It's hard for us to respond in the abstract." And come back to the meeting when you have a plan, she told them.

While they were out, Katie Mullin of TNDC led a discussion of the Collaborative's genesis and where the membership wants it to go.

"The original idea was to pick up where the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force left off, with public safety, land use and other committees, for example," Mullin said. "But that fell by the wayside, and the Collaborative has become month-

ly meetings of a full group with general updates." She said that's useful, but noted that the group lacks residents and merchants.

"I'm a resident and I speak for three resident groups," said Michael Nulty, president of Alliance for a Better District 6, and Tenants Association Coalition. "But I don't speak for all residents. It's hard for me to get up for early morning meetings. If you met at night, you'd have more residents, and more business people, as well."

Nulty also suggested a membership form, so people will feel they belong.

Urban Vision's Roger Gordon, at his first Collaborative meeting, said that his organization organizes South of Market merchants. "We found that the early morning meetings, like 8:30 a.m., work best for them."

Hope noted that Southeast Asians, one of the neighborhood's largest ethnic groups, aren't represented.

Despite all that, most of the people seem happy with the Collaborative.

"This is the first time I've seen a group in the Tenderloin that doesn't fight," said St. Anthony's outreach worker

Roscoe Hawkins. "But do we speak for the community or is this just a place to get information?"

"I feel like everything we talk about gives us room to choose actions," said Lara Huberman from Hamilton Family Residence. "It feels comfortable."

Beverly Karnatz from Lutheran Family Services said the Collaborative has been her pipeline to the neighborhood.

Jackie Jenks from Hospitality House asked if the Collaborative had a mission statement that members could hand out when trying to recruit others. One had been created early on, Hope responded, and maybe should be reprinted. The topic of whether the Collaborative will appear again on the May agenda.

Before adjournment, the Boeddeker contingent returned, announcing a park stewardship program to be launched April 22, during the hours when the park is regularly staffed.

And will the \$30,000 be lost? According to SPUR's Calandra, "I really doubt that we'll lose the money. We'll be able to advance it forward to the next fiscal year." ■