



EXAMINER / JULIE STUPSKER

Sgt. John Macaulay Park, dedicated to the police officer who was killed in 1982 during a shootout, is being transformed into a children's playground in hopes of saving it from drug addicts and dealers.



Making Tenderloin more child-friendly

New playground dedicated in name of district cop killed in line of duty

By **RAY DELGADO**
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

JEANETTE MACAULAY could use an available kid or two.

The great-grandmother of three can't wait to visit the Tenderloin District park named after her police officer son when it reopens next month, but to get past the gates, she'll need to be accompanied by a kid, and all her descendants live too far away.

Sgt. John Macaulay Park at O'Farrell and Larkin streets is undergoing an extensive overhaul that will turn the former haven for drug addicts and the homeless into a children's playground. The park, named after the popular beat cop who was killed in the line of duty, is set to open in mid-July and will have signs posted requiring any adult who enters to have a child in tow.

"Uh-oh, I really haven't thought of that," said Macaulay, who attended community meetings and wrote letters to former Mayor Frank Jordan and current Mayor Willie Brown to get the park reopened as a children's playground after it was closed in 1995. "Maybe they'll give me a special pass."

The child issue might be a minor headache for Macaulay but it pales in comparison to watching the park fall into disarray about a year after it opened in 1983 and to the five-year

struggle to have the Recreation and Parks Department reopen it as a children's playground.

The park had been named in honor of John Macaulay, who was killed in a 1982 shootout while attempting to arrest a robbery suspect who was carrying a concealed weapon. Macaulay, 34, had just been named a sergeant seven months before his death and was a popular beat cop in the Tenderloin.

The rough and tumble streets of the Tenderloin might not be the first place people think to build a children's playground but the re-opening of Macaulay Park is just the latest effort to provide some measure of normalcy for 4,000 kids who live in the district.

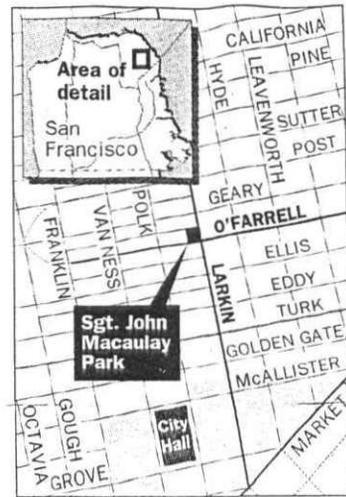
Never mind that the playground will be located directly across the street from a strip club with scantily clad women advertised on its exterior or that the sidewalk toilet in front of the

park gates is known as a den for drug deals and addicts.

This is a neighborhood where available recreation space is at a minimum, and children's advocates will take what they can get.

"Almost everyone who lives in the Tenderloin lives in a single room, including families," said Midge Wilson, the executive director of

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0.5 miles

EXAMINER GRAPHICS

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the Bay Area Women's and Children's Center, which spearheaded the effort to reopen the park. "As a community, we needed to do something to make the neighborhood more family friendly."

The park was first closed temporarily in 1995 after complaints from neighbors that it was being used as a public toilet, a place to sleep and a shooting gallery for addicts.

The department kept the park closed in response to neighborhood concerns that it would continue to have the same problems when it opened again. Instead, it decided to pursue funding for transformation to a children's playground.

The funding request moved slowly, but eventually \$600,000 was allocated from the Open Space Fund to rip up the existing park and start anew.

Ground was broken on the project last October, and the park is just weeks away from joining Tenderloin playgrounds at Civic Center Plaza and Tenderloin Children's Playground on Ellis Street. A playground for preschoolers is being constructed at the corner of Turk and Hyde streets.

The hope is that the fenced-in Macaulay Park will be so swarmed with children that dope dealers and those looking for a bathroom will simply walk on. It's a tall order, most acknowledge, but the park will attempt to keep out anyone who tries to enter without a child.

The Recreation and Parks Department also plans to staff the park full time during its 9 a.m.-to-dusk hours, and the police department has pledged to step up its patrols in the area.

"One of the things that's always irked me was the fact that that park

was utilized by the homeless, street people and drug dealers," said Northern District station Capt. Alex Fagan. "My officers will be enforcing the rules. Unacceptable behavior will not be tolerated."

If attendance at other parks in the neighborhood is any indication, Macaulay Park will be a big draw for families.

The playground will be split into two sections, one for toddlers and the other for older kids. The bright red, green and yellow jungle gyms come with four slides, swing sets, monkey bars and three mini train stations for kids to sit inside.

There is also a Braille alphabet posted on a piece of the jungle gym, an educational tool showing children the proper symbols for each letter of the alphabet. The sentence, "I feel good," is translated into Braille below the letters.

Thuyen Truong walked by the playground with her 3-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter and admired the equipment, much of which is still wrapped in plastic.

"I like it very much, this is very good," said Truong, who lives in a nearby apartment on Larkin Street with her husband. "(Civic Center playground) is nice, but sometimes I don't go because it's too far."

A homeless man who gave his name as Marcus also praised the playground as he walked by, saying, "That's a great park, as long as you can keep the crackheads out."

Across the street at the New Century adult theater, General Manager Harley Hall said he was glad The City was doing more to help Tenderloin children but he wished the playground was located somewhere besides being directly across the street from his theater.

"This is an adult business," Hall said. "I was a little surprised that it would open here. They knew we were here."

Hall said he didn't plan to tone down the outdoor posters of busty women in suggestive positions wearing little clothing.

"I know it's a bit racy but everyone's covered," Hall said. "In this neighborhood, this isn't the worst thing that they see, that's for sure. I think parents are more concerned of drug deals going on 10 feet away from their park."

Jeanette Macaulay is also concerned about avoiding the problems that plagued the park in the past, but she feels more confident this time around because of the playground concept.

Her son would have liked it, she said.

"He was always interested in the children of the area," Macaulay said. "I was so happy to hear that they were going to turn it into a children's playground. I think my son would have really liked that."