



NOAH BERGER — Staff

William Williams, 12, and other South Berkeley residents braved Saturday morning's rain to celebrate the opening of a mini park on 63rd Street. Williams' mother, La Shaun Howard, helped organize the park's revitalization.

South Berkeley celebrates revived park

By Cecily Burt
STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — There isn't much greenery in South Berkeley, all the more reason for kids and parents to celebrate the little slice of nature on 63rd Street.

The refurbished 63rd Street mini-park, complete with red and purple play structures and a new lawn, opened to great fanfare Saturday morning.

The block-long mini-park was created in the 1970s, during a big push to turn blighted or vacant properties into small urban oasis. Still, the vast majority of the city's parks are in north and east Berkeley.

Planning for maintenance of the city's parks is tight, and like so many others, the 63rd Street mini-park had deteriorated over the years. Many play structures were no longer safe and most were not accessible to the disabled.

Slowly but surely, the city is upgrading its parks. Last week, San Pablo Park opened, and several others are to open.

The city first gave \$7,000 to upgrade the 63rd Street park,

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La Shaun Howard

but that was before La Shaun Howard went to the City Council to plead for more money. By the time she was done, the city had given the community \$80,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to fix up the park.

The upgrades have done more than fix up the grounds, Howard said. They also have invigorated the community and given kids a place to play.

Drug activity, which seemed

to be the only activity in the park before it was completed, has decreased now that neighbors are watching out and reporting anything suspicious.

The lighting, which wasn't there before, is also a big help, Howard said.

“Because the park was in such ruin, the kids didn't even play over there,” she said. “The sandbox was filled with needles. So we were hoping that by refurbishing the park, it would decrease the drug activity, and it did.”

Now instead of sand, there are wood chips. There are trees, grass, a water fountain, swings, tunnels and a slide. Red and purple, mind you.

“The kids got to pick their

own play equipment and their own color,” Howard said. “Lisa (Carrona, Berkeley's parks director) and I were totally against it, but that's what they wanted so Lisa gave it to them.”

Mark Liolios, chairman of Berkeley's Partners for Parks, said it really took community support to get the work done.

“It's a little slice of green heaven in the city of Berkeley,” he said.

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