



THE PACT:

THE PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL TRIBUTE NEWSLETTER

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Grand Crossing Park

Advisory Council

Friends of the Parks

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PARK ADVOCACY BY CHOICE:

Written by CeCe Edwards and Ted Seals, Grand Crossing Park Advisory Council

How do ordinary citizens improve open park spaces where they live, work and play? One answer is, "Park Advocacy by Choice."

Community people and stakeholders clamor for purposeful open spaces within their own neighborhood parks, and move to take direct, democratic action to get neighboring youth and park users resources. "Park Advocacy by Choice" helped us to manage the arduous work that rejuvenated our park into a beautiful oasis of hospitality and opportunity at Grand Crossing Park.

The Grand Crossing Park Advisory Council (GPAC), established in 2005, dedicated its efforts to advocate for a better quality of life for our youth, seniors and patrons in our neighborhood park. Grand Crossing Park is located at 7655 South Ingleside in Chatham/ Greater Grand Crossing and is an Illinois Historic landmark designed by the Olmsted Brothers. Grand Crossing Advisory Council, Inc. is also an Illinois Not-for-Profit Corporation.

"Park Advocacy by Choice" is a democratic, citizen-led park movement that impacts our park's future for the next generation. Park advocacy engages ordinary citizens and residents to get involved and actively support their own parks in their neighborhoods where we live; it is the work of everyday residents speaking up to improve their local parks, not because they have to, but because they want to see things move beyond what they are to what they could and should be to improve the lives of park neighbors. Democratic Advocacy can succeed in collaboration with the Chicago Park District, but it takes work on both sides. Park Advocacy's role is constantly being redefined: mentoring youth, securing resources, seeking capital improvements, hosting fundraisers and marketing programs, like special events including movies, jazz and theater. Change comes by rolling up your sleeves and jumping in with your passion and your heart, for the benefit of our youth and by putting children first!



Photo Above: Ribbon Cutting of Grand Crossing Park playground. Photo Page 2 Top: Family enjoying Grand Crossing Park. Page 2 Center: Kohls Cares award with GPAC President CeCe Edwards

New and Improved: Old to New

Although in acetic shape for years, GPAC moved our park forward to get critical operational and capital improvements: ADA washrooms, playground and field renovations, - (cont. page 2)



(continued from page 1) historic field house repairs and added amenities. We urged the Park District to replace diminishing resources for our park. Instead of waiting for the answer, we changed things. We got a new children's community build playground,

drained the "swamp" in our baseball field, participated in Earth Day stewardship work that saved our historic trees for years, put Shakespeare in our park, brought the Midnight Circus to our park (the first south-side park to do so), and many more things, with help from Friends of the Parks, elected officials, Chicago Park District and others in both the business and residential community.

Park Advocacy was not only our choice, but was and is driven by our passion for our youth. When we started our park council, 20 years of gashed resources took its toll. We rolled up our sleeves and began to pass out flyers to recruit park volunteers, visited local elected officials, worked with the Park District and Friends of the Parks (FOTP). Erma Tranter, former President of Friends of the Parks, backed a \$250,000 community fundraised playground build at Grand Crossing Park. As Tranter put it, FOTP "jumped at the chance to work with an active park advisory council, a local community and the Park District to build a children's playground in an underserved neighborhood. GPAC is an active advisory council and relished such a partnership."



Park Advocacy is what Democracy looks like!

GPAC's democratic advocacy has led to results at our park with support of FOTP and former Chicago Park District Superintendent Tim Mitchell. Twelve years later, GPAC's relationship changed, arguably with the arrival of a new Chicago Park District administration. Motives are yet unclear, but our council's volunteer efforts to bring youth

programs and park resources crawled for years. Why? We believe a Park District comprehensive plan was lacking to tackle our park's many significant, historic changes. In the aftermath, our Council has been subjected to endless efforts to force us out of existence and has culminated in our being denied the right to hold our meetings in the fieldhouse. All, without any appeal, and without any explanation and only once, an apology for the first attempt to oust our members and president who has been in the forefront all these years, fighting for our children, which is what this is all about! What happened to the Chicago Park District's mantle of "Children First?"

This year the Park District removed our PAC's contact information from their website citing compliance issues. GPAC complied, but found discrepancies as the Park District has no jurisdiction over citizens. GPAC members want to continue the wonderful work we have accomplished. Our council's focus today is on our park's conditions, opportunities for at risk youth and creating a safe environment for our next generation to grow up in. And perhaps our efforts will also shine a light on the Chicago Park District's actions, and we hold great expectations that GPAC will touch the hearts of those with power to stop the

interference. We are Community Park Advocates by Choice and grateful that we have been challenged to rethink the role of our neighborhood park as a space for Democracy.

In light of these contradictions, GPAC believes Park Advocacy deserves a PAC peer committee to lead democratic change in the way the Park District

treats volunteers and distributes resources. We need one. No one person's authority should hold a PAC's or community's fate. Children's lives are at stake! The Lucas Museum struggle for open spaces affirmed our right to advocate for Democracy in our Parks!

For more about our council, visit our website at www.GCPAC.net and like us on Facebook: www.Facebook.com/grandcrossingparkadvisorycouncil.

Please join us for Friends of the Parks' June 9-10, 2017 Annual Luncheon and Conference, "Rethinking the Role of Chicago's Parks: Parks as Democracy?" Register at fotp.org today!