

Park Bloc: A City Ranger's Private Security Firm is Being Paid to Patrol a Park

By Dirk VanderHart

Portland officials will take all the help they can get sprucing up Northeast Portland's Holladay Park.

So in 2014, the city began a partnership with Lloyd Center owner Cypress Equities and another company to "activate" the leafy 4.3-acre space—adjacent to three MAX lines and known as an epicenter of problem activity. Last summer, and again this spring, the so-called Holladay Park Partnership (HPP) sponsored activities (ping pong! A piano! Bookshelves!) and classes (Zumba! Tai chi!) to general acclaim throughout the park's operating hours.

It's when those hours ended that the worst issues arose.

"Some items left overnight were burned and/or broken," says parks bureau spokesman Mark Ross.

This summer, the HPP is back in force, and it's tapped familiar faces to curb the vandalism. The *Mercury's* learned a private security firm owned by the city's park ranger supervisor, and run by Mayor Charlie Hales' former police adviser, won a bid to work night patrol at the park.

Documents show the HPP is "donating" nearly \$1,500 a week for security services between 8 pm and 6 am, when rangers don't work. To do that job, the HPP picked Safeguard Security, Inc. out of six applicants vying for the contract.

Safeguard was founded in 2009 by Hasan Artharee, who's supervised the city's park rangers since 2012. Artharee says he hasn't managed the company since he got a job with the city, though he still retains 100 percent ownership and earns income through Safeguard.

Management of the company, these days, falls to Artharee's father, Baruti, who served out a tumultuous period as Hales' adviser on public safety before resigning in October 2013.

It's a complex pretzel to unknot: HPP, a nonprofit group that partners with the parks department, is paying a security firm owned by the lead park ranger—and managed by a former mayoral aide—to patrol Holladay Park at night.

Parks officials say it's all on the level.

The bureau provided internal memos from early June, when Safeguard won the work. The documents claim Hasan Artharee had no role in selecting his company for the contract. They say the selection was carried out by a New York-based firm called Biederman Redevelopment Ventures (BRV), which is masterminding the Holladay Park activities.

BRV Project Analyst Rodrigo Rodarte says he reached out to Safeguard after the company was recommended by another security firm, Portland Patrol, Inc. Rodarte says the parks department recommended another firm, Pacific Patrol Services, for the job.

Safeguard beat out five other companies for the job, and Rodarte says that was largely because Baruti Artharee had a personal interest in the park, and insisted on meeting staff there before submitting a bid.

"We were impressed that he requested to come and meet with us," Rodarte says.

Rodarte says he had no notion of the Artharees' connection to city government until late in the selection process, when the city requested BRV hold off on signing an agreement while it looked into the arrangement.

"I had no contact with BRV regarding this process, nor was I aware of it until my father told me about it," reads a memo Hasan Artharee sent his supervisor, Parks Security Manager Galina Burley, on June 2. In the document, he pledges to avoid all matters that concern his company's contract, and to be sensitive to matters involving Holladay Park in general.

Safeguard's charging a base rate of \$21 an hour, 70 hours a week, meaning the Artharees' firm is making roughly \$1,470 a week from the contract.

This article has been changed to reflect the following clarification: Rodrigo Rodarte says Portland Parks and Recreation recommended local firm Pacific Patrol Services for the security contract.