

Much-used Ventura Park gets innovative improvements

Once a more rural counterpart to closer-in Portland neighborhoods, East Portland has some catching up to do in terms of investments in its parks. But, thanks to the Parks Replacement Bond, East Portlanders will soon see a lot of major improvements in local parks. By late 2017, Ventura Park, on Southeast Stark at 113th Avenue, will be home to two new features: the city's first PlayForm7®, an innovative play sculpture by Playworld®, a division of PlayPower® Inc., and an ultra-functional Portland Loo that replaces severely overused portable toilets.

Arlene Kimura has devoted the past quarter century to volunteer work with an eye on improving East Portland through public investments. She has represented her community's needs through her service on the East Portland Action Plan, the East Portland Parks Committee, and as chair of the Hazelwood Neighborhood Association. Home to Ventura Park, Hazelwood is one of Portland's largest and most diverse neighborhoods, running from Halsey to Division Streets between 96th and 148th Avenues.

"More and more things are happening at Ventura Park," Arlene says with pride, as she ticks off its many uses: the Free Lunch + Play program serves 200 kids for 60 days each summer, the Portland Slavic Festival brings in 10,000 visitors each July, and an August concert series she helped organize attracts 500 to 800 people per event. Many neighbors bus, bike, or walk to the park to use its playground, walking trails, and bike pump track.

With a bus stop on its south boundary and a network of paved paths on flat ground, much of the park is accessible. The 30-year-old playground, however, has been an exception. With Bond-funded improvements to park paths and the installation of new accessible playground surfacing, the improved playground will challenge kids of all abilities.

When Arlene heard that Portland Parks was partnering with Playworld and the Design Museum Foundation on their Extraordinary Playscapes exhibit at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, she requested that the PlayForm 7 be permanently installed at Ventura Park. This play piece riffs off the idea that kids love to play on public sculptures. At last count, kids have found 42 ways to use its slacklines, towers, and ropes. "We are really pleased to get this unique playground," she says. "Many of our families have kids, and other neighborhood parks don't offer as much for families to do."

Arlene joins her neighbors in their excitement that Ventura Park will be seeing upgrades. "Ventura is a well-used park that's worthy of public investments. With the Bond improvements, residents really feel like they are getting something for their tax dollars."

