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New name, amenities at Loesch Family Park Re-opening set for Saturday

By *Elizabeth Murray, Special to The Reporter*

Jul. 3, 2012



Rev. Bill Loesch stands next to the sign that bears his name. The newly renovated park will be re-dedicated on Saturday. Photo by Elizabeth Murray

For 27 years while living across the street from the Cronin/Wainwright Park on Brent Street, Dr. Rev. Bill Loesch spent time planting flowers and trying to make it more attractive for visitors. Now, the newly renovated park he worked so hard to beautify will bear his name, as it will officially be unveiled as 'Dr. Loesch Family Park' this Saturday.

Rev. Loesch founded the Park Partners group to rally the neighborhood for improvements to the grounds and later called for city support to make the park a safe place for neighbors to meet. Rev. Loesch and his neighbors held twice-weekly meetings in his house for years to brainstorm ways to improve the neighborhood. Meetings usually averaged about five people unless a more serious topic was to be discussed.

"The major concern was always, 'This is here, what can we do to improve it?'" Rev. Loesch said.

Rev. Loesch has always been a very active member of his community, helping form the Codman Square Neighborhood Council and the Breath of Life Dorchester (BOLD) teen group. He was very active in civil rights issues in Boston, marching side-by-side with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and riding to school with students during the 1970's busing crisis in Boston. Rev. Loesch and his daughter Cynthia have most recently been outspoken civic leaders in the Codman Square area.

"I've always been a person that was raised to be very active in my family and very active in

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whatever church or group I'm involved with," Rev. Loesch said. "Be very active with those right around you because that's what counts is getting to know people and work with them. I've sort of lived that way."

More than \$1,000,000 in improvements to the park were funded by Mayor Menino's Capital Improvement Program and by a Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Renovations for Communities.

The 2.24 acre park, popularly known as Wainwright Park for the street that defined its western edge, was originally named in 1922 for James L. Cronin, a Dorchester man killed in action during World War I. A memorial to another war hero, 20-year-old Navy Corpsman James F. Keenan, who was killed in action in Korea, has been moved to a more prominent place in front of the entrance from Melbourne Avenue. Rev. Loesch said he had suggested the park's name be changed to 'Peace Park' or 'President Barack Obama Peace Park.'

"Then the next thing I know, they didn't take my suggestion," Rev. Loesch said. "But it's very humbling. They don't name parks after living people, so that's even a bigger honor. I'm very honored to have been active with the park and have the park named after me, and then to be part of watching all these folks use the park and enjoy [it]. My goal is to make it a happier park, a friendlier park."

On a tour around the newly renovated park, Rev. Loesch told the Reporter, "It was terrible [before the renovations]."

Rev. Loesch said the process of renovation was a result of talking to different individuals and groups in the community, like children, basketball players, and parents, to put together a list of things that needed improvement. He stressed that all the things may just seem like little pieces, but they all matter.

The renovations will increase opportunities for active recreational activities and will provide respite for park users. The basketball court has been expanded to meet National Basketball Association (NBA) regulations, and a second smaller multi-sport court has been added as well. Rev. Loesch said this will prevent younger players from having to wait for the bigger hoops and from being exposed to profanity from the older players. Both courts are fully illuminated until 10 p.m. each night, and a set of bleachers has been installed next to the NBA-sized court.

"The point is physical exercise, more opportunities to get physically fit, and more opportunities to get out of the house instead of just sitting in the house and watching TV," Rev. Loesch said. "The whole point is encouraging more people to get out of the house and enjoy nature, enjoy getting to know your neighbors."

The former tennis court has been eliminated completely to redesign circulation paths and better reflect existing foot traffic patterns. New lighting along the pathways will enhance public safety at night and the former chain link perimeter fence has been removed and replaced to make the park look more welcoming, Rev. Loesch said.

The path loops around the park to encourage walking and jogging groups to exercise in the park. Rev. Loesch said a path also stretches from the corner of Wainwright Avenue and Brent Street diagonally across the park since people cross through the park to get to the Shawmut T station.

"People for 20 years would cut through here, so there was a little dirt path in the outfield of the baseball field," Rev. Loesch said.

The existing Little League field has been converted into a multi-purpose field, and the playground has been expanded to accommodate older and younger children. It also has a seating area for parents and a water spray feature, which Rev. Loesch said has been very popular lately because of the heat wave. He further pointed out that the park is now home to 13 benches as opposed to the two it had before the renovation, making it easier for neighborhood families to meet.

Other features — like groundwater infiltration of water from the spray feature, remote-controlled

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court lights, bike racks at every park entrance, and 20 new shade trees— are aimed at making the park more eco-friendly. The play equipment was supplied by a certified manufacturer that used a rubber surfacing consisting of 67 percent recycled material. More trash barrels have been added to the park to encourage people to keep the park clean and more flowers were planted.

Rev. Loesch said the rubber surfacing for the playground was an especially good investment since it was much safer than wood chips or mulch where things like pieces of glass could easily be hidden.

"It's expensive, but we've been guaranteed it will last for a long time," he said. "You can see everything that's on the surface and then can remove anything that shouldn't be on the surface."

Rev. Loesch said he is pleased with the renovations made, but not all of the requests were met. These needs, like more trees and picnic tables, are not as urgent as the renovations that were made and can be met over time, he said. He has also encouraged members of his BOLD teen group to spend time in the park talking to visitors to see what else could be improved.

During the park tour, Rev. Loesch did just that, greeting neighbors and strangers alike, asking them what they thought of the park and inviting them to Saturday's grand opening at 2 p.m. The reopening celebration will include face painting, a community string quartet and refreshments provided by H.P. Hood LLC as well as a visit from Mayor Menino. In the case of rain, the opening's rain date is set for July 21.

"I'm extremely happy with what I've seen happen because everyone got involved with designing it," Rev. Loesch said. "The Parks Department did a super job getting the job done with quality work. I'm looking forward to having more families [visit]."



Diane Molle · Dorchester High School

Grew up on Melbourne right where it meets Brent with the park being right outside my house across the street. We were at the park everyday and in winter it was flooded and frozen and we skated at night, dancing skating with your favorite guy or friend. Wonderful~!

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