

Thomas W. Broening — Mercury News

Dancing youngsters celebrate East Palo Alto's seventh anniversary and the city's first Children's Day

East P.A. celebrates park's renaissance

By De Tran
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It was a coming-out party of sorts for Jack Farrell Park, or, more fittingly, its renaissance.

Taking advantage of a sunny Saturday, more than 100 people showed up at the East Palo Alto park to celebrate the city's seventh anniversary. The daylong event, organized by the anti-drug crusaders United Mothers Against Drugs, also was hailed as the city's first Children's Day.

The celebration commemorated the day seven years ago when residents voted to graduate from an unincorporated section of San Mateo County to cityhood. This year, residents also celebrated the fact

they have reclaimed the park.

The playground has become a symbol of the community's struggle to get rid of drug dealing.

Jack Farrell Park for years was overrun by drug dealers. Its facilities were in disrepair from neglect. Grass grew high. The playground was littered with syringes. It was no place for children.

Community volunteers, many from the United Mothers group, went to work about a year ago. They mowed the grass, planted flowers, fixed the bathrooms, repaired the swings. And as the sign at the park now proclaims, "Jack's Back."

"Aren't you glad that we have

‘A year ago, you couldn't have anything like this.’

— Jennifer Jackson, a celebration organizer

recaptured the park?" asked Mayor Bill Vines, who attended the event along with other politicians and community leaders.

Vines told the crowd he envisioned East Palo Alto someday becoming the richest, cleanest city on the Peninsula.

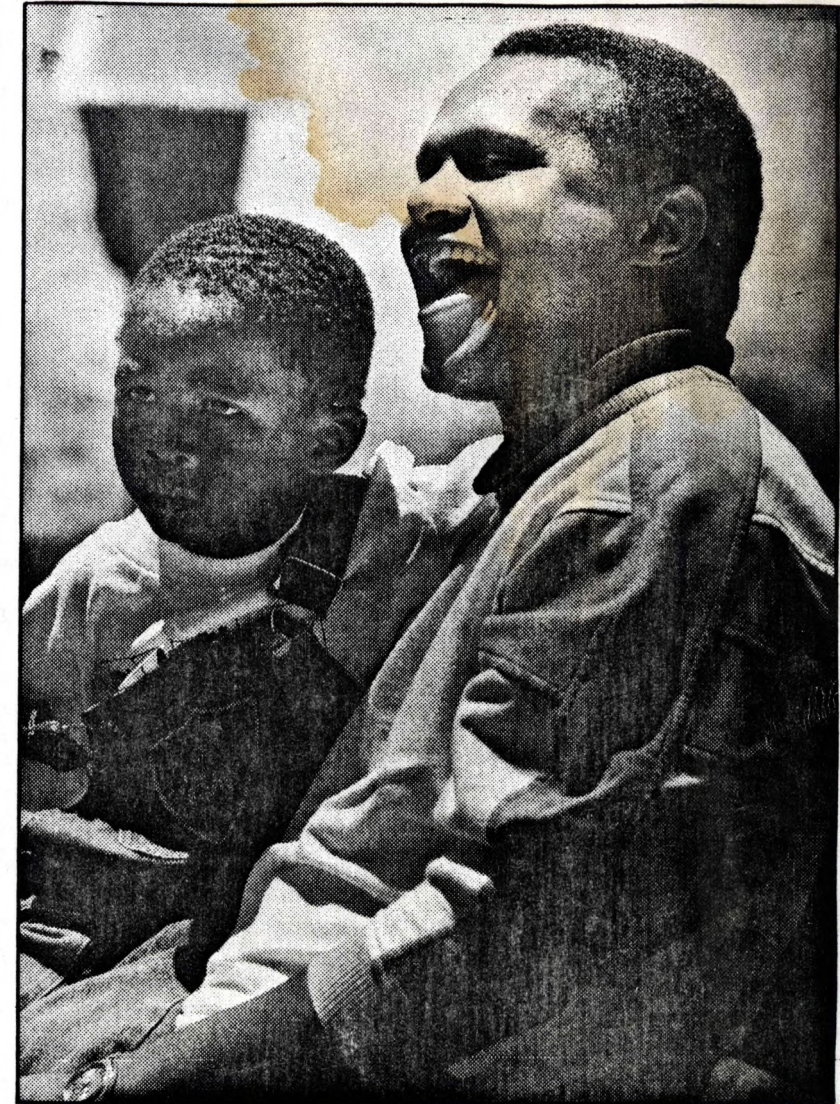
"We're going to be the envy of the Peninsula," he said.

Supervisor Tom Nolan, repre-

senting San Mateo County, added, "We're going to be here to realize the mayor's vision."

While politicians spoke, the children played. They biked, ran, talked and played catch on the spacious field. As the day went on, there was music, dancing and various contests for the kids.

"A year ago, you couldn't have



Jonté Fuller, 3, Dr. Tony Shelton watch the fun

Jackson, one of the organizers, as she watched the children play.

While enjoying the festivities, community leaders emphasized the need to keep the park drug-

free.

"There's been talk that (the drug dealers) are going to take it back," said anti-drug activist C.W. Roddy. "And we the citizens keep saying, 'No, you won't.'"