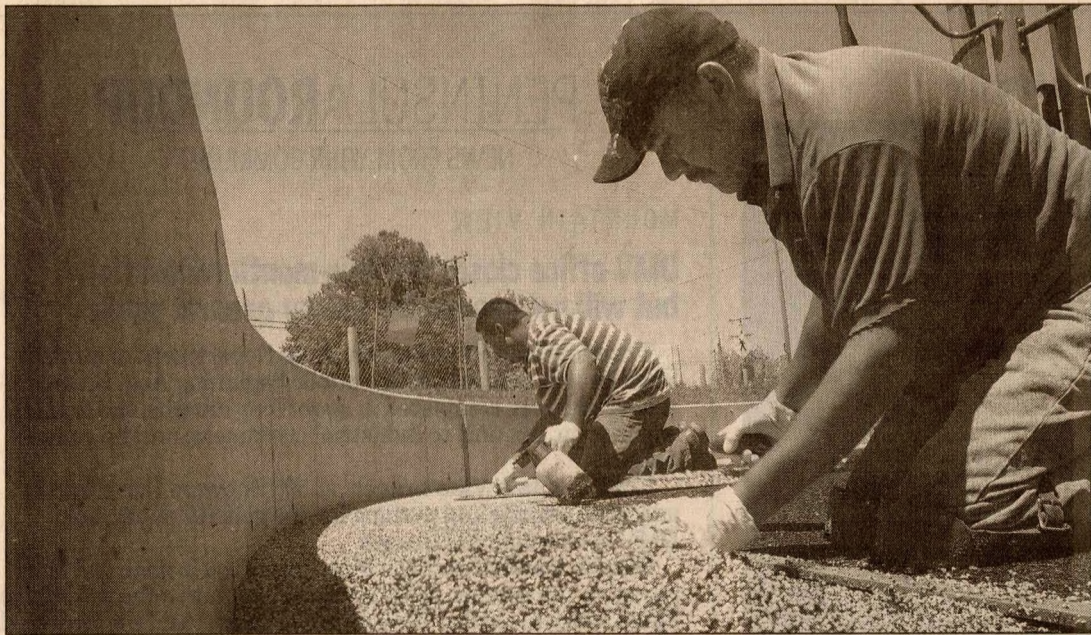


7/27/02

CEREMONY FRIDAY HONORS REOPENING OF EAST P.A.'S JACK FARRELL PARK



JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Cuauhtemoc Rodriguez, left, and Rolando Cisneros apply a rubber surface to the playground at East Palo Alto's Jack Farrell Park on Thursday, in preparation for the park's reopening on Friday.

Old park gets new life

By **Thaai Walker**
Mercury News

Charmaine Airy, pigtailed and 5 years old, sat under a hot sun Friday on a brand new carpet of grass at Jack Farrell Park in East Palo Alto, feeling a bit bored.

She was there with her tiny T-ball teammates — the Indianapolis Clowns — for the reopening of the once-shabby and notoriously troubled park, which has undergone a major overhaul.

Charmaine pulled tufts of grass out of the ground as adult after adult gave speeches. For city leaders and residents it was a chance to acknowledge the hard work behind the renovation and to reflect on their long-held dreams for this day — when they could stand proudly in a park that was once a source of shame.

But reflection is not for 5-year-olds. All Charmaine wanted to know was, when would all the talking stop so she could play?

"They're not doing anything that's fun," she said. Her little friends nodded.

Nearly \$1 million has gone into renovating Farrell Park, including state and federal dollars and \$100,000 from the



Hassan Naddaf of Mountain View works on restoring the restrooms at Farrell Park.

San Francisco Giants to refurbish the baseball field. Plans are in the works for the other city parks. The challenge, city officials said, will be to make sure the city secures the revenue to keep them all maintained.

Located on Fordham Street, Farrell Park is one of the city's oldest. It's had its share of troubles. For many years it was a haven for drug dealing. Several shootings in and

around the park didn't help its reputation.

The city never had the money to fix it up and so it was never a particularly pretty place. What little grass there was often was brown; the playing fields were run-down. It would flood in the rainy season.

Robert Gates was Charmaine's age when he first started playing ball at Farrell Park. Now fully grown, he smiled broadly as he looked around the new field.

"This used to be grit and gravel. I'd be scarring up my knees and stuff," he said pointing to what is now a lush green baseball field. "And the benches were just flat old boards — you'd be getting splinters on your behind."

Charmaine didn't recall having played at the park, but she was aware that it used to be "old."

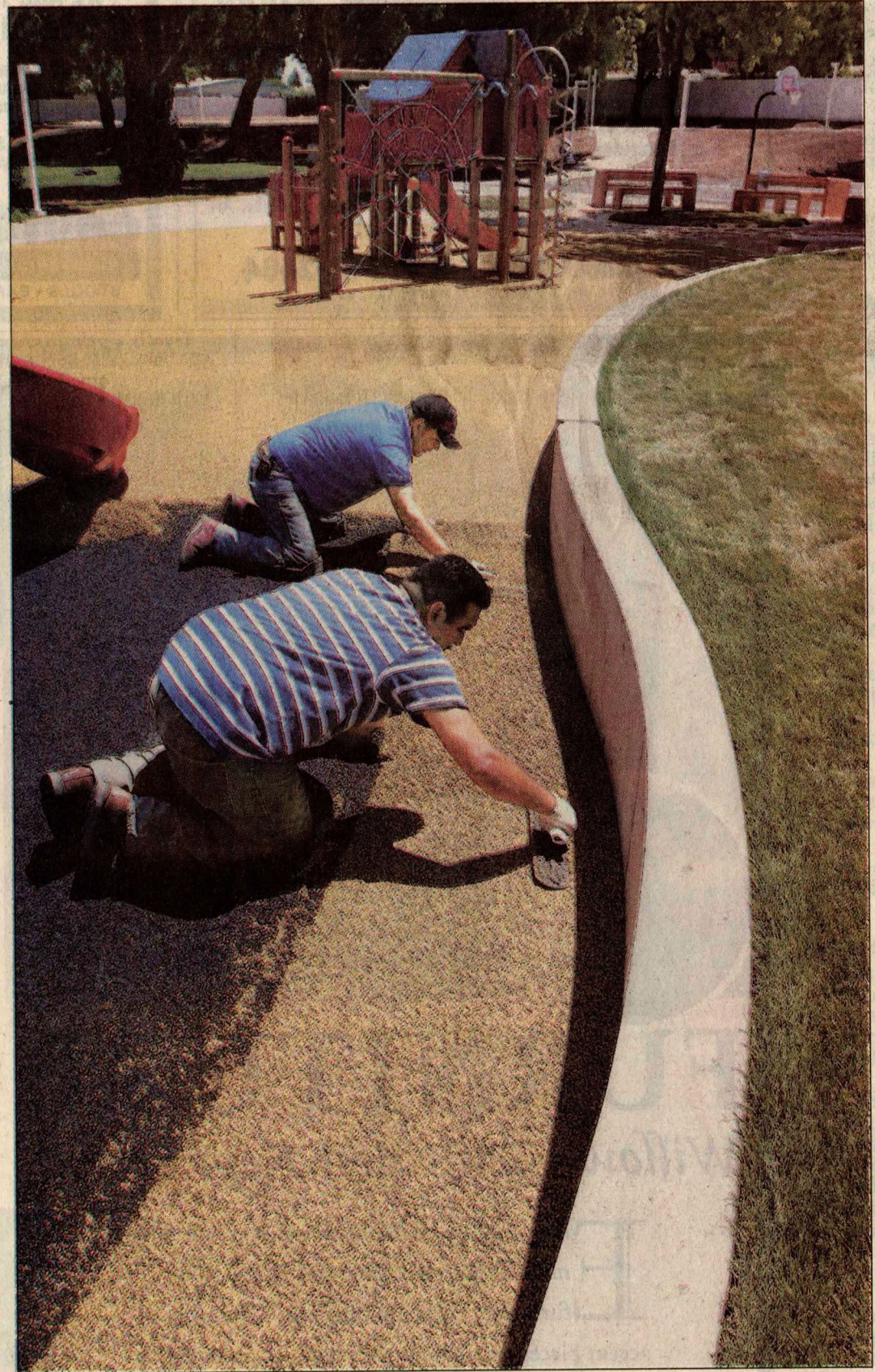
"Really old," she added.

Eventually the speeches ended and the baseball field was christened by the first pitch. Charmaine jumped up and joined her friends and together they ran off to play.

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East P.A. park reborn with help

Rolando Cisneros, top, and Cuauhtemoc Rodriguez work on the playground area at Jack Farrell Park in East Palo Alto for Friday's reopening. Nearly \$1 million went into the renovation. State and U.S. funds and \$100,000 from the San Francisco Giants to refurbish the baseball field helped turn the park from shabby into a dream. **SEE STORY, PAGE 4B**



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