

A park that's full of drugs

Jack Farrell Park has had a turbulent history

By Marsh McCall
Times Tribune staff

One community leader calls it "the worst piece of geography in East Palo Alto."

Jack Farrell Park, named after a Ravenswood School District official dedicated to expanding recreational activities for young people, was intended as a tranquil haven for children and families.

Today, the park located between Fordham and Gonzaga Streets is indeed a haven — for "crack" cocaine deals and violence.

The turbulent history of the rundown, graffiti-infested park was highlighted once again early Wednesday when 26-year-old rookie police officer Joel Davis was fatally shot moments after pursuing a gunman through the park.

The tragic incident marked the second murder in recent months linked to the park.

In March, Myastone "Michael" Baker, who police say was a drug dealer, was fatally shot behind the park restroom, apparently at the hands of a customer who felt he had been cheated.

Farrell Park was a public stage for acts of violence as early as a decade ago.

In 1978, police clashed with groups of hundreds of people in bitter struggles for control of the area. As many as 50 people at any one time loitered or dealt drugs in the park, according to police reports at the time.

A year later, two men were slain in the park after about 100 people converged on the property over the weekend.

East Palo Alto police Friday declined to comment specifically on the history of the park, citing the area as part of the investigation over the slaying of Davis.

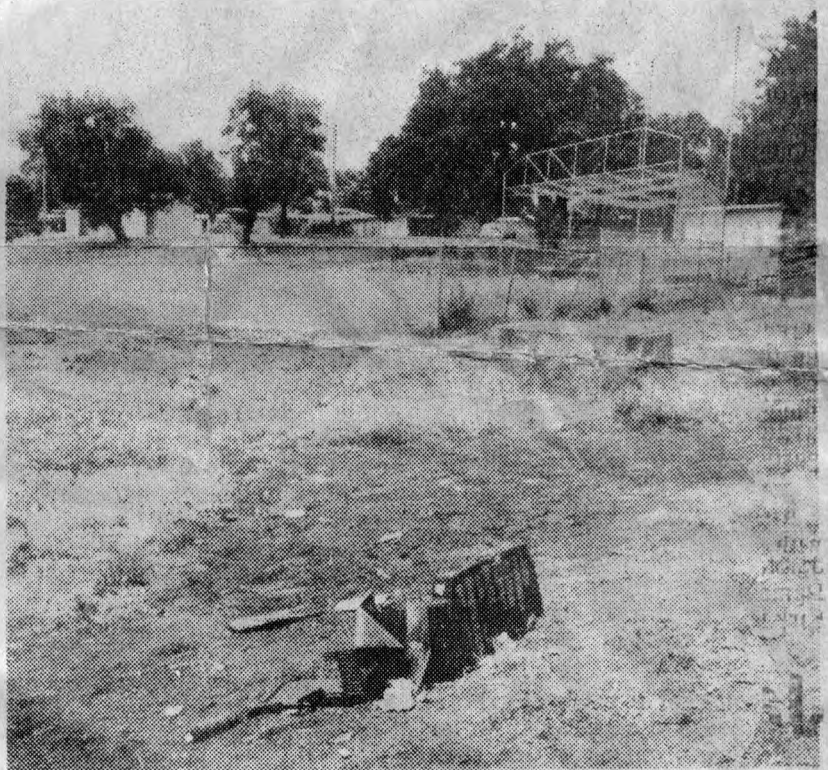
However, a police source identified three-acre Farrell Park as "one of 11 (drug trafficking) hot-spots in the city."

"It's not the worst spot, but it's the most visible," the source said.

Officials for the Ravenswood School District, which at one time owned the park, named the acreage after district Parks and Recreation Director Jack Farrell in 1955 in appreciation for his commitment to expanding recreational programs to the community.

Farrell, who later served as city manager of Atherton for 17 years, died in March at the age of 67.

At first, the park served its purpose well, according to Bob Hartley, a 15-year East Palo Alto resi-



Times Tribune staff photo by Joe Melend

Jack Farrell Park, named after a man dedicated to expanding recreational activities for young people, has seen better days, and been put to better uses.

dent and the founder of COPE, a group of citywide anti-drug crusaders.

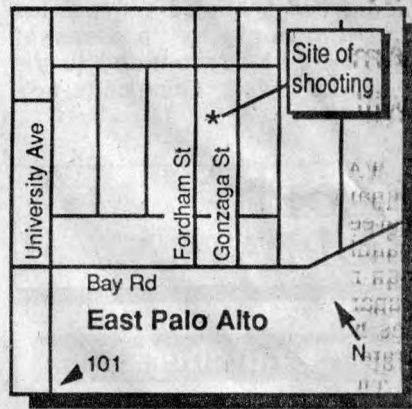
"It was really Americana," Hartley said. "It was serene ... there were potlucks from churches — and always some kind of youth activity."

Today, Hartley said, the park is "the pits."

Despite recent efforts by San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force agents to rid the city of its incessant street drug trafficking problem, Farrell Park remains a favorite hangout for crack pushers.

Motorists passing the park along Fordham are flagged down in broad daylight.

Children playing in the park sandbox reportedly have found buried drugs, while police have



The location of Jack Farrell Park.

warned residents to stay away from the park restroom area, notorious for drug dealings.

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