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Albany's North Swan Street Park comes back to life

A vision transforms Albany site into community center
By Steve Barnes
Updated 9:30 pm, Saturday, June 27, 2015

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Arlene Way, president of the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association, speaks during the official opening of the renovated North Swan Street Park in Albany's Arbor Hill on Saturday, June 27, 2015. (Steve Barnes/Times Union)



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"This park makes my heart smile," said Arlene Way, president of the [Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association](#), as she glanced around the newly renovated North Swan Street Park on Saturday afternoon.

The park, on the corner of North Swan and Second streets, five years ago was a crumbling

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paved lot with a weed-pocked basketball court surrounded by falling-down fences. Today it is an environmentally sensitive, multi-use outdoor community center with playground equipment, benches, small amphitheater, eight-nozzle spray pad, swaths of grass and a new, smooth half-court basketball court.

"This park is proof that if you have vision and you bring it together with like-minded people and action, you can make things happen," Way said.

of the park, an occasion that brought together community members and representatives of the many groups that made the revitalized corner possible.

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"No so long ago, you'd go by and you would never have heard kids in this park," said Albany Common Council member Ronald Bailey, who grew up in Arbor Hill and whose 3rd Ward includes the neighborhood around the park. He said, "Now you go by, you hear the children playing here."

Seed money for the park was provided with a \$30,000 grant in 2010 from the Strategic Alliance for Health, a program of the Albany County Department of Health. The largest portion of the park-overhaul budget was from a \$318,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Fund of the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, with additional funds provided by other local and state offices, programs and agencies. Volunteers from charities, community groups and professional firms were invaluable as well, said Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, who was among the speakers.

Before the official ceremony began, Sheehan was chatting with Ramon Gonzalez, 15, who lives nearby on North Swan. When Gonzalez said he did not have a job lined up now that school is over, Sheehan tried to steer him toward the city's Summer Youth Employment Program. Gonzalez said he was already signed up for a city basketball camp.

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"OK," Sheehan said. "That's good you'll be doing something. But at some point you've got to work, build that resumé."

After Sheehan left Gonzalez said, "I probably have to get a job, but I'd rather be playing basketball here in the park. It's really cool now."

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