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Pickwick Park lands new park

By CATIE FRY

Staff writer

Residents of the 232-home Pickwick Park area who embarked on a project 10 years ago are finally seeing their dream unfold into a reality.

Toddlers, moms, and senior citizens will have a community area at the new Pickwick Park, scheduled to break ground next year.

Pickwick Park Civic Association President Elizabeth Wolfe said the park on Chrysler Drive will be a safe place for the children in the neighborhood to play and is the No.1 reason for the park's creation. Members of the association have flocked to Wolfe's house for community meetings, and she said the residents' reaction about the park is a positive one.

"We're just thrilled," she said. "We've got blind curves, and people shortcut through here and people speed."

She also noted the project has been a decade in the making, beginning in the mid-1990s when about three acres of the site used to be home to the Pickwick Pool and a private water facility. The other section of the site, across the street, was undeveloped land. After the Pickwick Pool closed in the mid-1990s, former City Councilman Dick Kravitz was a key leader in getting the run-down water facility torn down, said Pickwick Park Civic Association member George Koester. The land was eventually turned over to the Parks and Recreation Department, he said.

In 2002, former City Councilwoman Mary Ann Southwell appropriated \$300,000 of her district's funds to buy the three acres on Chrysler Drive. At that time, the project was put on hold because of a JEA easement over the other 3 acres of property and lack of money, City Councilwoman Sharon

Copeland said.

In 2004, the city approved a bond that gave each district \$1 million for public use, said Copeland, who presides over Mandarin.

"I wanted to make sure we spread it across the district," she said.

Copeland allowed the Department of Parks and Recreation a \$350,000 budget to develop Pickwick Park.

Wolfe said Pickwick Park Civic Association members fought for years to get the water plant torn down and the land bought for neighborhood use. Wolfe, who has been with the association for 19 years, said "it's been a group that has come and gone." Koester, a member of the association since the late '80s, said the park is a much-needed addition to a neighborhood that has been neglected for two decades.

"I think it will bring the neighborhood together," Koester said.

Three council members and more than a decade later, the association's hard work and persistence is finally paying off.

Groundbreaking for Pickwick Park is about a year away, said Pam Wilson, spokeswoman for the city of Jacksonville. A master plan for the park has been completed and drawings for a final plan begun. The total cost of the Pickwick Park is estimated at \$1 million, Wilson said.

Phase one of the park will involve fencing and landscaping the area, adding access entries to the park, and adding two play areas for 2- to 5-year-olds and 5- to 12-year-olds, said Tom Roberts, senior project manager for Applied Technology and Management, the leading design company for the project.

Phase two will include lighting in the parking area, architectural entryways welcoming guests, more landscaping, sidewalks, two picnic pavilions with grills, and a one-of-a-kind fitness trail for senior adults. It's called a life trail, and it will be the first of its kind at a Jacksonville park, Roberts said. The trail will be geared toward adults, with 10 senior fitness stations placed around it. The park will also be handicapped-accessible.

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