

A walk in the park

Citizens and private donors made Midtown Park what it is

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Cuddy Midtown Park next to Loussac Library could have been a scene out of a Norman Rockwell painting Saturday.

The park teemed with people doing things. Kids kayaked gently on the small pond. People walked poodles on paved paths. Families listened to a spirited duet -- "Anything you can do, I can do better" -- at an outdoor stage. Roller-skiers raced around an asphalt oval, which will become a speed skating track in winter.

All of the action unfolded amid acres of grass so green it overwhelms your senses, with trees, daisies and poppies planted here and there.

The grand opening this weekend showed the park at its finest -- a beautiful spot in the middle of Midtown's commercial district, where one can go for a moment of serenity, or some vigorous exercise, your choice.

Cuddy Park's existence is a testament to the tenacity of citizens who began fighting for green space at the site more than 20 years ago.

In 1983, Helen Nienhueser began pushing for a park in Midtown, where she worked. Art Geuss soon joined her. The city bought the first piece of Midtown Park in 1987.

The park grew gradually, to about 16 acres. A group of four architects and planners voluntarily drew up a plan for it. The Cuddy banking family, Congress, city taxpayers, the state and others contributed money to expand and develop it.

But for years, with no houses nearby, the park was little used. It's hemmed in by busy streets, between A and Denali Streets, Tudor Road and 36th Avenue. Hard to get to, unless you know it's there.

In 2004, the city brought up consultants who advised creating more opportunities for activities in the park, such as ice skating, playing in playgrounds, going to concerts or skiing.

And creating easier access to it -- a walkway across the library parking lot, for example.

Midtown Park is not completely finished. There's no walkway from the library yet, it needs a new playground and some other items.

But the park's new design, meant to draw people in, succeeded wildly on opening day. About a thousand people showed, said city parks director Jeff Dillon.

Congratulations to the many who contributed their ideas, money, and effort. You've made your city a better place to live.

BOTTOM LINE: Citizens and planners have turned Cuddy Midtown Park into a well-polished gem.

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