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Midtown park nears completion



The park will include an outdoor performance theater along with a speed skating oval and walking path. (Kyle Stalder/KTUU-TV)

by Steve Mac Donald
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- The municipality and civic leaders have long dreamt of creating a quiet slice of green space amongst all the blacktop, steel and mortar that makes up Midtown Anchorage.

After years of work and planning that dream is about to be realized.

Workers installed one of the Cuddy Family Midtown Park's cornerstones Tuesday afternoon on a warm summer day.



The park has long been a dream of city and civic leaders. (Kyle Stalder/KTUU-TV)

A landscaping crew toiled with a 14-foot-tall Colorado spruce tree under the midday sun.

"I have always wanted to copy Rockefeller Center," says Betti Cuddy.

And as the tree was planted her thoughts were on Christmas, of all things.

"So the tree is going to look great. I hope we can decorate it at Christmas time," Cuddy said.

She's dreamed of a Midtown refuge for a very long time.



Betti Cuddy and her family have donated greatly to the park, which bears their name. (Kyle Stalder/KTUU-TV)

The Cuddy Family Midtown Park is still about two months from being finished but it's easy to see it will become a place to escape the surrounding urban chaos.

"This is a little beyond everyone's expectations," said Jeff Dillon, director of the city's parks and recreation department. "It's really coming together well."



A grand opening ceremony is scheduled for Cuddy Family Midtown Park Aug. 23. (Kyle Stalder/KTUU-TV)

The park's completion will bring a 15-year quest to an end for the city of Anchorage. It's been a long and sometime tumultuous process trying to meld everyone's vision for the Midtown green space.

"They couldn't understand how each could get along. The speed skating oval was going to dominate the entire park and take up the whole space," Dillon said. "Bringing in a user group or a professional planning group that could talk about how to piece those together so they would compatible really helped."

Dillon says a New York consulting firm was able to incorporate everyone's ideas and vision. The park will include a walking path,



Municipality of Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department Director Jeff Dillon (Kyle Stalder/KTUU-TV)

a skating oval and a small outdoor theater.

And the ways the city has financed the park are as varied as the users.

The city received money from several public and private sources, including two federal appropriations and a hefty contribution from the Cuddy family, according to Beth Nordlund, the marketing director of parks and recreation.

In fact, the lake was created with a federal flood control grant.

Cuddy Family Midtown Park is actually an amalgamation of money and ideas, with grass still left to plant and pavement to pour.

"I think the whole neighborhood, the whole town will be overwhelmed when they come and see it," Cuddy said.

And it will be an early Christmas in Midtown when the park is finally finished.

A grand opening celebration will be held Aug. 23.

Nordlund says she plans to have a theater group performing on the stage and in-line skaters competing on the oval as well as music and other events.

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