



Everything New Orleans

Project to clean up New Orleans parks gets families involved

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By **Leigh Ann Stuart**

Historic Desmare Park in Faubourg St. John is looking vibrant, thanks to the dedicated members of the **Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association**. After two rained-out dates, a hot, sunny Saturday morning provided a perfect opportunity to spruce up the park at **3456 Esplanade Ave.**



Catherine Threlkeld, The Times-Picayune

Leo Teague, 2, rakes leaves at Henry Desmare Playground at 3400 Esplanade Ave. as part of the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association's efforts to clean a local park every month.

The Desmare park cleanup took place as part of the neighborhood association's monthly "Coffee, Rake, Gab, Garden" event series.

Neighbors gathered from 9 a.m. to noon to chat, enjoy refreshments such as iced coffee, fresh fruit and pastries, and work on improving a well-loved space.

"We have a very cohesive neighborhood, and I think that it's just a wonderful opportunity for us to all get together and do something constructive together," Brenda London, FSJNA outreach chairwoman, said of the event.

The rotating park cleanups were devised to help neighbors socialize while lending a hand, said FSJNA neighborhood association member Steve Mardon.

"I figured something like this is a good way to get people just out to meet other people, have fun and do something positive," he said.

FSJNA has been holding "Coffee, Rake, Gab, and Garden" events since March, when the group first gathered to clean up Fortier Park. The group also recently cleaned up Capdeville Park in the 2600 block of Esplanade.

London said the events are designed not only to spruce up parks, but to get some of Faubourg St. John's younger families involved in the neighborhood.

Parents gathered in clusters to collect yellowed leaves, whack weeds or chat over a beverage while children lent a hand to rake and shovel with kid-sized tools.

Kerry McEachin brought her daughter Jane, 3, to help. "We live in the neighborhood and we actually come to this playground a lot," McEachin said. "It's just a great neighborhood spot. It's convenient, and we have a lot of kids in the neighborhood and they all gather here, which is really fun."

Ashley McClaran, who brought her son Eli, said, "There are a lot of kids to play with at the playground. That's how we meet people."

"We don't have a backyard, so this is our backyard," McClaran said.

Reuben Teague said his family has built great memories in Faubourg St. John. Desmare was one of the first parks his son, Leo, ever visited, he said.

"We come to this park almost weekly, and we love having the space in the neighborhood," Teague said.

Members of the Dad's Club of **Cabrini High School**, next to Desmare Park, were also on hand to pitch in, including Oscar Sill, Ira Austin, Len Grabert and Ken Martinez.

"It's like a big family in the neighborhood, I think, and we want to make it nice for each other," London said.

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