



**National Recreation
and Park Association**

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**Washington Parks & People and NRPA Celebrate
Park and Recreation Month with Community Photo Project in Marvin Gaye Park**

Ashburn, Va., July 26, 2010 – On the evening of July 23, 2010, Washington Parks & People (WPP) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) celebrated national Park and Recreation Month with Our Eyes East, an exhibit showcasing photos and stories about Marvin Gaye Park, and the health and lives of residents in the “East of the River” Ward 7 community of Washington, D.C. The event featured images and interviews taken from 20 youth and adult participants, who documented their lived experiences in and around Marvin Gaye Park during a one-month period in the spring of 2010. The participants used the parks theme as a central vehicle to raise awareness of the issues faced by underserved populations in D.C., and promote community change.

The Our Eyes East event was held in celebration of a decade of revitalization at Marvin Gaye Park, as well as the one-year anniversary of the installation of a new playground through Parks Build Community—an ongoing collaboration between NRPA, WPP, George Mason University and the District of Columbia. The collaboration seeks to increase the physical activity and health of the area’s young people, and increase the connection between the local citizens and the community.

“There is really a powerful story to be told here,” said WPP President Steve Coleman. “It’s truly moving to see what kids can do...what people can do...what communities can do, when we come together in parks.”

“I think the Our Eyes East project has made people look at the park differently,” said Dr. Autumn Saxton-Ross, assistant director for health in parks for WPP, and Our Eyes East project manager. “It reintroduced the kids to what you should be doing in a park...to just come and hang out—that is something that they were not used to doing.”

Some project participants presented photos and essays with themes such as powerlessness, drugs and violence. For example, the essay for a photo by 12-year-old Max Bryant, displaying a used needle on the ground, stated, “I don’t like the drug addicts and violence in my community. When I look at my photo, I feel pain and sadness.”

“I see our children in trouble and things do not seem to be getting...better,” wrote Raquel Ifill, a 16-year resident of the area. “You know, change is around us, but the people are still kind of bound.”

Other photos and essays intertwined themes of hope and beauty, such as 6-year-old Terrance “Pooka” Morton’s photo of a green swirl of grass. “This photo is expressing growth. This photo relates to my community because there are many green spaces,” Pooka wrote.

In another photo by 10-year-old Erin Bryant, a woman and a child are eating together on a blanket.

The woman is smiling down at the child. “This picture is great, because two people, a mom and a daughter, are coming back to the park and picnicking like it used to be. There were changes that day because someone was brave enough to have a picnic in the park,” wrote Erin.

During the event, NRPA CEO Barbara Tulipane made a special address to the children in the crowd, and thanked them for taking good care of the park over the year. “Everything you do here is so important, and we are telling your story to people across the U.S.,” said Tulipane.

She added, “For me, Parks Build Community and projects like Our Eyes East are about bringing this community together. When the community comes together, everything else sort of falls in place...but it has to start there.”

Also featured during the evening were a community break dance session and a performance by the Batala Washington Percussion Band.

Digital copies of the exhibit photos are available by request. Please contact Amy Kapp at akapp@nrpa.org.

For more information about the Our Eyes East photo project, contact Autumn Saxton-Ross at autumn.saxton-ross@washingtonparks.net.

About Washington Parks & People

Washington Parks & People began in 1990 with the transformation of the single most violent park in the capital region, Meridian Hill/Malcolm X Park, into one of its safest. WPP leads greening initiatives across Washington, D.C., including massive land reclamation, native reforestation, watershed restoration, public health and fitness programming, urban agriculture, and green job training, to help revitalize once forgotten communities. For more information, go to www.washingtonparks.net.

About the National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 20,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

For more information, visit www.NRPA.org. For digital access to NRPA’s flagship publication, *Parks & Recreation*, visit www.parksandrec-magazine.org.

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