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## Park improvements continue

Friday, June 10, 2011

By [Melissa Flores](#)

### Dunne restroom facilities open to the public after renovation of interior

Visitors to Dunne Park may have noticed a few changes in recent months, such as railings painted around the clubhouse and new recycled rubber material in the playground area. But a few weeks ago, the Dunne Park change team saw the completion of one of their primary goals to make the park more appealing to residents - the public restrooms have been refurbished and are now open to park goers.

"It's like a hurrah thing of the month for sure," said Lisa Faulkner, who has worked with the Dunne Park Change Team to implement a grant from the Health Trust for the last year. "The whole project I would say was about \$13,000 and most of that was sponsored through The Health Trust. The city made a donation on behalf of the Dog Owners Group of Hollister."

The initial proposal called for replacing stalls in the restrooms at the park, bordered by West, Powell, Sixth and Seventh streets. Faulkner said contractors were paid to do different pieces of the project, but that Jason Ballew donated time when it became clear that a back wall of the restroom would have to be replaced.

"He helped us out so we could get it done before Dog Days of Hollister (in May)," Faulkner said. "Because of the cost savings, the city will put a picnic table there as well."

The Hollister Youth Alliance received a \$100,000 grant to do advocacy work for 16 months - with the goal of increasing healthy eating and exercise among residents in the Dunne Park neighborhood.

The funds come from The Health Trust, a Silicon Valley-based nonprofit that selected three local organizations as part of the Healthy People Healthy Places grant through the Convergence Partnership Fund of Tides Foundation. The HYA and Faulkner hired teens to become part of the change team, paid through the One-Stop Career Center.

The initial grant has been used to monitor the park, survey neighbors about what types of improvements they would like to see at the park - short term and long term - and to do some initial improvements at the park.

Though the grant was primarily for advocacy, Faulkner said the Health Trust allowed a portion of the funding to be used for the bathroom repairs and drinking fountain.

"Without that structural element it was really hard," Faulkner said. "With the bathroom it makes it a more usable space. We felt like we needed to have that."

The restroom facilities will be particularly handy as summer events are planned for the park. The first will be Kids At The Park on June 15 (see related story, C1), from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The change team is also working with other agencies to coordinate concerts in the park and an outdoor movie series, with dates to be announced.

"It feels like we are accomplishing our mission and goal," said Diane Ortiz, the executive director of the Hollister Youth Alliance. "It is a testament of what we can do by really focusing our energies on an area or a system and making sure some good positive changes have happened."

The youth alliance has worked on the project with other community agencies such as First 5 San Benito, the Hollister City Council, Hollister Parks Department, San Benito County supervisors, the Gang Prevention Task Force and the Community Food Bank of San Benito County.

Anaid Godoy is the change team leader, and one of the teens who has been involved in the project since its inception.

"I'm glad the bathrooms are finally done," Godoy said. "Everyone can enjoy (the park,) especially now that school is over. The kids are going to love it."

Godoy has worked with the other teens on surveying neighbors about the park, painting railings around the clubhouse and attending community meetings once a month.

"I think we can do way more," she said. "We've been getting a lot of kids involved from the high school and all around the community. They are cleaning up the park, painting the railings and fixing up the benches ... I think we are going to have a good outcome in the



A group of kids play a game of dodge ball at Dunne Park Tuesday afternoon.

Photo by: [Nick Lovejoy](#)



The newly renovated bathrooms at Dunne Park are now open to the public. The facility upgrade was completed just before the Dog Days of Hollister event, in May.

Photo by: [Nick Lovejoy](#)

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future."

Godoy said the group is looking into offering programming in the park, such as Tai-Chi, yoga, laughter walks and other physical fitness activities. Another idea is to start a healthy snack stand on site. The test forum for the snack shack will be Kids At the Park, where the change team members will hand out free healthy snacks in exchange for parents completing a survey about what types of snacks they would purchase and how much they would be willing to pay.

Faulkner said that in addition to the snack stand, the group is focusing on other improvements that can be done with future grants. She said there will be a community forum June 24, at 6 p.m., to discuss the possibility of a mixed-use plan for the tennis court. They are seeking input on a proposal to convert one of the tennis courts to use for outdoor hockey. Faulkner explained that a group of hockey players has been using the courts, but the hockey use damages the surface.

"They are coming to give us input on the plan," Faulkner said.

She will also be working closely with the change team as the group applies for a stewardship grant, due July 29.

"Our funders from The Health Trust are really impressed with the feedback, and by the way our community and elected officials are able to respond to the needs of the community," Faulkner said. "San Benito has its advantages when working with policy and advocacy."



**Melissa Flores**  
*City editor*  
[mflores@pinnaclenews.com](mailto:mflores@pinnaclenews.com)

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