

Tip-Off

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

TIP-OFF | CITY PARKS

PARKS AND RECREATION: A TOOL TO REMEDY URBAN FLIGHT



COURTESY SEATTLE CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Seattle is using its public parks and green space to promote better urban neighborhoods for families.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels began a big ball rolling in 2004 when he introduced the Center City Seattle plan to bolster city neighborhoods. Out of this effort came the Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods (FUN) project to make the city more con-

ducive to families.

Gary Johnson is the Center City Seattle strategy coordinator. He says that many young couples in Seattle's urban center gravitate to the suburbs when they begin having children. The goal of the FUN project is to retain these families by offering city-living benefits.

Johnson says that he is in the process of making policy recommendations to make the city's core more livable and to prove that parks are an integral part of this plan. "Parks and open space is a category we see as fundamentally important. You're asking people to trade their yard for a public area."

Many of the FUN objectives are still in planning phases, but the Center City plan has already had its hand in recent park efforts. Johnson says that a primary concern was the city parks' user group. "It wasn't being used by large groups of our citizenry," he says, indicating that homeless people had taken ownership of certain spaces. As a result, new park rangers, each of whom serves as a sort of "park concierge," will be milling about local parks from now on. Johnson says that there has been a renewed focus on programming to get new user groups out to parks, with more concerts, paid performers, and a busker system (see our arts programming feature on page 114).

Seattle's parks will become more of a system with green corridors between them, Johnson says. Making downtown more family-friendly will involve developing park space, along with focusing on right-of-way for pedestrians to convey a sense of safety. The benefit, he explains, is that "this is based on universal design standards. What is good for one user group is likely good for another."

For more information on City Center Seattle, visit www.ci.seattle.wa.us/mayor/issues/centercity/.

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