

Bixby Park Revamp Starts With Fundraiser

By Jonathan Van Dyke

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With funding for city projects shrinking, it's the perfect time to throw a party.

That's what the Friends of Bixby Park will be doing next Thursday in an effort to raise money for the Bixby Park Parcel One project.

"The city is going to support us however they can with their own means," said Claudia Schou, Friends board member. "But they've had budget cuts, and so they've already told us they won't be able to match our funds like they were able to at the playground on Livingston."

Therefore, the organization will host this latest fundraiser with the hopes of raising \$75,000 for the Parcel One project, Schou said.

With that money, organizers said they hope to transform the area of Bixby Park next to Broadway, between Cherry and Junipero avenues.

"We're looking at making it a very user friendly and outdoor courtyard space," said Steven Sennikoff, owner/architect of Sennikoff Architects, who is donating a design for the space. "We're going to have a new fountain, and maybe a nice Spanish revival water feature."

Sennikoff said he wanted to line the area with trees and plants and create somewhat of an "enclosed outdoor space."

"Broadway is a busy street right there," he said.

"We're trying to create a visual impact for the people who go by so they know it's there — but within it you're experiencing the outdoors without feeling like you're between two busy streets. You're going to want to go there, but once you're in there you're experiencing this fountain area and not the street you entered from."

Other features could include mosaic tile work, special landscaping and historical plaques and other features that will incorporate the history of Bixby Park, he added.

Eventually, the plan is to install a full playground for \$250,000 — but the fountain area next to the band shell will be scheduled first, Schou said.

The fund-raising event will include guest speakers Stan Poe (Long Beach Heritage Historian), Dennis Eschen (former manager of the Parks, Recreation and Marine Department's Planning Bureau), Denis McCourt (co-artistic director of Long Beach Shakespeare Company), John Thomas (Bluff Heights Neighborhood Association president) and Vice Mayor Suja Lowenthal.

The silent auction will include a variety of things to bid on: A cooking class in Paris, tickets to a Nascar event, a shopping spree at Bloomingdale's, an adventure trip to Machu Picchu, a NASA shuttle launch trip, a wine tasting, tickets to the ESPYs, tickets to the Grammys and a special opportunity to make your own skateboard or surfboard and learn the sport.

Other items up for auction will include a special bike ride with Lowenthal, a tennis match with Third District Councilman Gary DeLong, or a lunch with Gazette Newspapers executive editor Harry Saltzgaver.

"Everyone seems to be pitching in to make this event a success," Schou said.

The event's meal will include a special salad, stuffed chicken portabella, bruschetta, garlic mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables.

There will be a wine tasting before dinner and Westerly Music Department will play jazz and classical music.

"All of the funds raised at the event will go toward Parcel One, but we'll have cards people can take home to fill out toward the playground design," Schou said.

If enough money is raised during the event or within the next few months, Schou said the organization ideally would like to start breaking ground by the summer.

"Our goal is to pay homage to the history of the park, but also celebrate the community's involvement in making the park great," she said.

"It is one of the most economically and culturally diverse parks in Southern California. And it boasts one of the most spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean."

The Friends of Bixby Park fundraiser will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 10, at the Museum of Latin American Art, 628 Alamitos Ave.

Tickets will cost \$65 per person or \$100 per couple. Call 983-8139.