

The Modesto Bee

modbee.com

[Print This Article](#)

Posted on Fri, Jun. 13, 2008

Marshall Park community center opens Saturday

ADAM ASHTON

aashton@modbee.com

last updated: June 13, 2008 09:59:39 AM

Marshall Park used to be a pretty spot with a tough reputation.

"They had a lot of homeless people and it was no good," said Luis Hernandez, 50, who lives across the street from the Sutter Avenue park.

The park is about to emerge from a two-year renovation, reopening Saturday with a new community center, police station and fire station designed to improve safety in Hernandez's west Modesto neighborhood.

"It's beautiful for the kids," Hernandez said, as he scoped out the park this week.

This weekend's ribbon-cutting closes two years of construction on the \$4.6 million Neighborhood Center at Marshall Park.

It's a first for the city because it merges the parks programs with both public safety departments.

"We work in concert with one another in everything we do, so building facilities that make that happen logistically makes sense to us and I think to the community as well," said Jim Niskanen, director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhoods.

He and the police and fire chiefs are crowing about the opportunities the neighborhood center gives them.

- It provides the Fire Department a 7,000- square-foot station, replacing the 1,500-square-foot home on Second Street that used to house a fire company. The older Station No. 2 barely could fit the engine in its garage, Fire Chief Jim Miguel said.

"This facility is long overdue. We've been talking about it for over 20 years," he said.

- The neighborhood center will be the home for west Modesto's Weed and Seed program, a federally funded partnership that aims to improve the neighborhood. Three police employees are expected to work out of the center, Police Chief Roy Wasden said.

- It streamlines parks services, allowing the city to run recreation programs at Marshall Park and the nearby Maddux Youth Center on Sierra Drive. The King-Kennedy Memorial Center on Martin Luther King Drive will continue to host some city events, but it's under the management of a nonprofit organization.

"It's a perfect triangle," Niskanen said of the three west Modesto community centers.

The center has several features designed to keep the park safe at all hours. All of the windows in the fire station look out on the park, for example.

"We really do see ourselves as caretakers for this facility. We're going to be here 24 hours a day, seven days a week," Miguel said.

The neighborhood center also is equipped to turn into an emergency base for residents, something that would have been helpful in the west Modesto neighborhood when it flooded in 1997.

Modesto gathered some of the money to pay for the center by taking out a bond against the \$2.5 million in grants it gets each year from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department. A HUD official suggested that strategy during one of the lobbying trips city officials took to Washington a few years ago, Niskanen said.

Other money came from capital improvement fees the city collects for fire and parks projects.

Jeremiah Williams, a member of the city's Weed and Seed committee, said the park renovation showed Modesto's commitment to improving the west side. He's organizing a Celebration of Dads that will take place there Saturday at 11 a.m., just after the ribbon-cutting.



Marshall Park can be seen outside the windows of the new West Modesto Neighborhood Center, which includes new facilities for police and fire units, and a redesigned Marshall Park. Fire Station No. 2 and the Modesto Police Southwest Area Office will be located in the new center. (Brian Ramsay/The Modesto Bee) - Modesto Bee - Brian Ramsay

"We really rally behind some of the things that are negative and we try our best to make them positive before they get too far out of line," Williams said. "It's a wonderful thing the city has done that."

Bee staff writer Adam Ashton can be reached at aashton@modbee.com or 578-2366.

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
Copyright © 2008, The Modesto Bee, 1325 H St., Modesto, CA 95354
Phone: (209) 578-2000.