

SPECIAL EDITION

ENGINEERING FEAT

How to Build 5 Acres of Green
Space Along a Downtown Freeway

THINKING BIG

The Dallas Leaders Whose
Vision and Work Made It Happen



MAKING DALLAS BETTER

STAYING ACTIVE

Cheese? Music? Yoga? Movies?
Visitors Find It All at The Park

EASY BEING GREEN

Landscape Architects Turn to
Hardy Grasses, Flowers, Trees

THE PARK

A Green Jewel for Dallas





Programming Power

From chess, lectures, yoga, and a lending library to movies, knitting, and dance lessons, Klyde Warren Park aims to offer outdoor activities for just about everyone.

By Shashana Pearson-Hormillosa

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In addition to planned activities such as dance lessons, knitting classes, and chess, local groups—including Dallas Children's Theater and students from Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts—will perform at Klyde Warren Park.

Photography: DTC courtesy of Dallas Children's Theater; Tap Dancers by Billy Surface; all others istock

For decades, Dallasites haven't had much choice when it comes to green-space venues that are perfect for outdoor activity. But Klyde Warren Park is about to change all that, and on a grand scale.

The deck park over Woodall Rodgers Freeway represents a paradigm shift for Dallas, both in the scope of its engineering and in its range of sport and cultural opportunities.

Physically, the park bridges the gap between Uptown's shops, restaurants, and residences and downtown's arts and business worlds. Less tangibly, but perhaps even more significantly, the park bridges a gap in community that has existed in the city for years.

Once upon a time, Dallas was known for its great parks. As far back as the 1920s, the City of Dallas provided outdoor areas for its citizens to gather to enjoy each other and to be entertained—by movies shown on outdoor screens; by fitness programs like tennis, badminton, and croquet; and by offering a way to beat the Texas heat with wading pools and swimming pools.

In 1985, the city even won the National Gold Medal Award from the National Recreation and Park Association. But then, the recession that swept across the country in the 1980s and early '90s washed out much of Dallas's economy. The economic downturn had a devastating effect on the city. The city's parks budget faced significant funding cuts, and the once-well-used parks began to fall into disrepair.

The opening of Klyde Warren Park is Dallas's first real attempt since then to get some of its outdoor-recreational mojo back.

To entertain the citizenry, the park will feature specialized programming from partner organizations representing a range of interests. These partners include the likes of the Dallas Museum of Art, the Dallas Opera, The University of Texas at Dallas, the Dallas Children's Theater, and the Dallas Center for Architecture.

From architectural tours, Mah Jongg and chess games, knitting, and fitness classes to live jazz and guest lectures by business-industry leaders, there will be ample opportunity to connect and find personal and professional enrichment—all with the backdrop of a lush "garden" in the middle of downtown Dallas.

A GREEN CITY

In 1995, Veletta Forsythe Lill was serving as a City Council appointee to the Central Business District's "gateways and linkages task force" when she first saw official mention of a deck park over the Woodall Rodgers Freeway. The report presented ideas to the City Council, on which Lill served

from 1997 to 2005, to link neighborhoods and to erase the impact of freeways in and around downtown.

“Dallas was just coming out of a difficult financial period,” recalls Lill, who in November will leave her post as executive director of the Dallas Arts District, a role she has held since 2009. “There wasn’t funding, and there wasn’t a singular person to carry [the idea] forward. There can be a vision for the city, but that vision needs a champion.”

In 2002, after a year and a half of research on 25 years’ worth of data, city planners issued a long-term plan for returning Dallas to a Golden Age of parks. A “Renaissance Plan for Dallas Parks and Recreation in the 21st Century” declared that “great cities are known for their great parks.” The report established a strategy for renovating more than 400 parks across the city and reinvigorating the city’s sense of community.

“Dallas is a big-vision city. A whole series of proposed park projects is transforming Dallas into a green city, and it’s exciting to be a part of that,” says James Burnett.

Burnett is founder of The Office of James Burnett, which designed the master plan for Klyde Warren Park, including the park’s size, location, and rough form. “I was blown away throughout the whole process by the optimism of the committee and the chief city planners who were behind this project,” he says.

Three years later, the Dallas City Council outlined obstacles downtown Dallas faced in creating critical mass, and strategies to overcome them. It included a proposal to build a deck park over Woodall Rodgers Freeway. The following year Dallas citizens approved a \$20 million bond package that would help fund the ambitious plan—and Klyde Warren Park was born.

YEAR-ROUND PROGRAMMING

By the time construction began in the fall of 2009, the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation, which manages the operations, programming, and maintenance of the park, had raised more than \$56 million in city, state, and federal funding, and millions of dollars in private funding.

By the end of this year, the park foundation will have raised the entire \$110 million needed to fund the park, more than \$53 million of it from private sources.

“The philanthropic community here is very vigorous,” says Dan Biederman, president of Biederman Redevelopment Ventures Corp., who served as a consultant on the park project. “It’s the individuals who made money in oil and gas and put it back into building the city.”

Biederman is best known for his work on the restoration and renovation of New York City's Bryant Park, which has largely served as the template for programming at Klyde Warren Park. In the late 1980s, Biederman took the derelict, crime-ridden Bryant Park and transformed it into a safe, award-winning green space enjoying a steady stream of visitors. The 9.6-acre park in Midtown Manhattan reopened in 1992 and today sees 6 million visitors annually.

Organizers are hoping to attract visitors on a similar scale to Klyde Warren Park.

In part, the 5.2-acre Dallas park comprises a 15,000-square-foot children's garden, a 2,600-square-foot reading and games courtyard, a 4,000-square-foot dog park, several water features, a restaurant, and a performance pavilion. The park is designed so that weight capacity won't ever be a problem. The great lawn alone can accommodate 3,000 people.

"It was clear from the beginning that we wanted this to be something that appealed to a large group of people," Burnett says. "We wanted to be inclusive, to not make it be a one-stroke idea, but something that works for a lot of people. The key [to that] is the programming."

So on a brisk day in February 2006—one of the coldest days of the year—a group of specially-invited Dallas citizens gathered at downtown's Nasher Sculpture Center to brainstorm ideas for programming at the new park. What came out of that focus group was a plan incorporating art, music, personal and professional development, fitness, and educational and entertainment opportunities for adults and children alike.

And, because the grounds are 65 percent shaded, this programming is intended to happen year-round. "We were worried about the climate," Biederman concedes. "We thought the park could be deserted on 105-degree days. The programming alleviates that."

With the help of BRV Corp., no fewer than 30 programming partnerships culled directly from suggestions made by Dallas residents have been formed between the park and member organizations. And, organizers expect to continue adding more.

Importantly, all the programs to be offered were identified as likely lures for park visitors. And, that will be good for the park's bottom line.

The park foundation will be fully self-sustaining, bringing in an estimated \$2.7 million to \$3 million in self-generated revenue annually. Although the programming is essential to the park's success, the programming doesn't directly result in revenue. Instead, cash flow will come from other means: sponsorships, event-site rentals, catering, and concession sales. The driving force making those income generators work, however, is a continuous flow of people into the park.

“Bryant Park got good [at programming] after a decade,” Biederman says. “Klyde Warren Park is going to open stronger than other parks, because there’s more programming ready on the first day.”

Lil has no doubt the park will be well-attended. “It’s a good time to be opening, because we’ve increased the density on both sides of the freeway,” she says. “Dallas has proved that it’s a city that loves to be outside. We like public gathering spaces, and this will be a unique public gathering space.”

STRETCHING, READING, BATTLING

“The Park will be like Dallas’ living room,” says Karen Buckner, co-owner and director of Bikram Yoga Dallas. “We’ve never had anything like this to bring us together.”

Bikram Yoga Dallas will offer a 60-minute beginner’s Bikram yoga class each week on Thursday evenings, starting Nov. 1. Buckner sees the class as a great opportunity for park visitors to sample a fitness program, and to challenge themselves into trying something they might find intimidating at first.

“People are really surprised that they can do yoga, and they are excited about the results achieved during the practice,” Buckner says. It’s not just the physical component, she adds, but the mental component that surprises them.

“Dallas really needs yoga because we are so busy in our lives, and it’s important to take a break and slow down without being stimulated,” she says. “It’s about relaxing, so that you can gain energy and have that balance. It’s less doing and more just being. The park is the perfect place for that to happen.”

The park was especially attractive to Peggy Helmick-Richardson, president of the Dallas Storytelling Guild, who was asked by foundation staff to bring storytelling to park patrons.

“I got the immediate impression that [the organizers] so understood what the needs would be for storytelling: quiet corners and areas removed from the chaos,” Helmick-Richardson says.

“Storytelling is incredibly flexible. If the environment is conducive, it will work.”

The guild has more than two dozen member storytellers who could be tapped to perform at the park. Performance materials largely depend on the performer, but can range from folktales to fairytales to personal anecdotes. For the guild, the material and performer is less important than the one-on-one connection storytelling provides.

“What we’d really like to accomplish [through the partnership] is a greater appreciation for

storytelling, because it allows individuals to connect on a personal, heart level,” Helmick-Richardson says. “As Dallas storytellers, we have stories that connect us to the community. And when you have a community sharing stories, all it can do is get better.”

The Dallas Public Library also has a plan to share its stories. It will work in conjunction with the University of North Texas Department of Library and Information Sciences to donate books to help furnish a lending library at the park. Books will be checked out, read on-site, and then returned.

Suliman Hawamdeh, chairman of the LIS department at UNT, would like to see his students help with the lending library’s operation as interns, or even as part of their student practicum.

“It’s good for our students to go out and meet people. It’s good for improving information literacy and to encourage people to read,” he says. “It’s a good idea for the library to go to the people, rather than just that the people go to the library.”

Hawamdeh sees the park’s lending library as a way to give back to the community through literature. “We look at this as an opportunity to reach out to more people, to help out and enhance literacy,” he says. “It’s part of our outreach to the public.”

In addition to the lending library, Hawamdeh hopes his team can present guest speakers and offer seminars on topics related to storytelling, reading and books, and knowledge and information management, among other things. They’ll cover anything that concerns the public, he says, and for which they can find a way to educate people.

Meantime, UNT and the Dallas Public Library have signed a memorandum of understanding together with the park. The agreement outlines that each partner, while working together, will make its own contribution.

Ronnie Jessie, programs administrator for the Dallas Public Library, oversees library programming systemwide. That includes bringing in local and outside authors, performers, and artists for presentations at the city library, as well as overseeing its used book store, BookEnds.

Jessie hopes to share those artistic assets with the park, as well as to donate some of the new and gently used children’s books from the store to the lending library. “I see the sharing of resources on both ends,” he says. “The downtown library makes up the fabric of education downtown, and I see the park and library working together to use the resources here at the library by expanding that into the park.”

Another university, the University of Texas at Dallas, will also participate in park programming, with

its award-winning chess team. The team has won nine Pan American competitions, one of the largest chess tournaments in the United States, and has been named this year's Chess College of the Year by the United States Chess Federation.

For the park's grand opening on Oct. 27, visitors were scheduled to have a chance to challenge two UTD Grandmasters, who will play 25 games simultaneously, from noon to 4 p.m. That same day, UTD will show off its robotic chess set constructed by mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and computer science students last year.

After the opening, team members are scheduled to practice in the park every Saturday from 1-5 p.m. at least until December 1.

WORKING TOGETHER

No doubt, collaboration will be key to a successful flow of activity at the park.

Nancy Schaeffer, education director for the Dallas Children's Theater, was collaborating with other arts groups at an education committee meeting at the Dallas Museum of Art when the idea struck her to join in on the programming at Klyde Warren Park.

"This city can be challenging [for citizens], but there are many great opportunities out there," Schaeffer says. "The more people that we can get going to museums or theaters or concerts, it's great for all of us. We all work together to share resources, and this is just a great fit—very natural for us."

Now in her 29th season with the DCT, Schaeffer is accustomed to providing programming to the public. Her team will offer dramatic activities and workshops at the park for children of all ages, on the third Saturday of each month. The workshops will be hands-on, relying heavily on audience participation. From time to time, the DCT also will perform stories and plays, such as *The True Story of Three Little Pigs* or *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley*. It's also in continuing discussions about offering a teen program in improvisation.

"It's going to be quite a learning experience for us. After a year, the programming will look different, there will be new things," Schaeffer says. "It's great to have the attitude that, 'We'll see how it goes.' That's theater; you adapt."

MOVIES, KNITTING, KICKBALL

Park organizers have pursued programming partnerships that are symbiotic and equitable—partners

who could offer something that would draw visitors, and for whom the park fulfills a need.

“It’s a mutual recognition that there was a great partnership to be had here,” says Lee Papert, president and CEO of the Dallas Film Society. The society has been in talks with park staff for the last two years about potential programming options. “There are things that we offer, and we need unique places to offer them,” Papert says. “The deck park provides that.”

The film society’s mission is to celebrate film, honor filmmakers, educate students, and promote the City of Dallas as a place for film. Klyde Warren Park is an opportune place for them to put that mission into practice.

A movie series is under development, and details of the arrangement are still being considered. But outdoor movies seem to be on everyone’s wish list.

“One of the natural things we do is outdoor movie screenings, so that makes sense,” Papert says. “Who doesn’t enjoy sitting outside and watching a movie on a nice spring or fall night?”

But the film society isn’t just about outdoor movies. Since 2007, the DFS has presented the Dallas International Film Festival annually. Next year, the DFS will hold some of the more family-friendly festival events at Klyde Warren Park. Papert also intends to hold part of DFS’s annual educational series there. The education program exposes between 400 and 500 high school and college students to the business side of filmmaking including screenwriting, storyboarding, and marketing.

“We’re bringing education and high school kids to the park,” Papert says. “We’re excited about the partnership, and look forward to exploring the possibilities. I hope and foresee that this will be a mutually beneficial arrangement for the citizens of Dallas, and for the whole community.”

Booker T. Washington High School for the Visual and Performing Arts, an award-winning Dallas Independent School District public magnet school located in the Dallas Arts District, will be lending its own high schoolers to the park.

Students from the school’s performing arts classes will perform in some of the main-stage shows, as well as appear in “sidewalk performances” similar to those seen in New York City.

Students from the school’s visual arts classes will use the park’s natural setting as a backdrop for their art, and as a place to showcase their work.

These are creative ways to bring art directly to the people of Dallas. “People in the metro area have

the idea that the arts are only for the wealthy or the elite. But the park really opens it up to everyone,” says Tracie Fraley, principal of the school. “It starts a dialogue around the arts and around education that is really special to our city. After all, how often do you get to interact with the artist?”

That speaks to the overall goal for the Dallas Arts District, in general, and the Klyde Warren Park, in particular: to create barrier-free programming where no- or low-cost options are available. Building the strength of the neighborhood—knitting together Uptown with downtown—is good for the citizens, as well as for the businesses that will utilize the space.

Consider Ronda Van Dyk, who opened The Shabby Sheep in Uptown in 2005. Van Dyk will host knitting classes and circles at Klyde Warren Park, which she calls her neighborhood park. As excited as she is for the exposure her small knitting business will receive from its park partnership, she’s even more excited about the direct impact she’ll have on the people who attend her sessions.

“There are a lot of people out there that are knitting on their own, so this gives us an opportunity to make it more of a community,” Van Dyk says. “An opportunity where people with a common interest can get together and share it. Or, we can pull people in from the community who haven’t had much experience in it.”

Following her store’s model, Van Dyk will offer weekly “knit-togethers” at the park, as well as specialty classes, charity knitting, and a celebration of National Knit in Public Day.

Says Van Dyk: “We just want to spread the joy of knitting all over the place.”

Another of the park’s business partners is the Studio 22 dance studio. Just three years old, Studio 22 has already made a name for itself. It’s the studio of choice for Dallas-based Dancing With the Stars contestants Mark Cuban and Michael Irvin.

Through its partnership with Klyde Warren Park, Studio 22 owners Michelle Hafle and Sergey Korshunov will bring those same dances to the general public.

“We love to introduce partner dancing and its benefits to people,” Hafle says. “A lot of people may see Dancing with the Stars and think that it’s not something they can do. But it is something they can do.”

The team will start by offering one-hour ballroom dance classes, once a week for one month, beginning Oct. 29. Plans are to offer a different style of dance each week. Studio 22 also hopes to provide large-scale performances. Ballroom dancing, Hafle says, builds communities, strengthens

relationships, and improves overall health.

Ballroom dance is “something people can incorporate into their lives,” she says. “This is a great community to be involved with. Dallas is a great social city and this is a great activity to fit Dallas’s lifestyle.”

The T. Boone Pickens YMCA might agree. It’s been catering to the active lifestyle of Dallas residents for many years. One of its most successful community programs is its adult kickball league at the Main Street Garden park. Because of that, volunteers with the downtown YMCA asked to get involved with the programming at Klyde Warren Park.

“We are all about healthy living, social responsibility, and youth development,” says Paul Conklin, associate executive director for the T. Boone Pickens YMCA. “I can say that the park embodies this with their vision and leadership.”

The focus of the YMCA programs at the park will be fitness and well-being. They’ll be split into two categories: health and wellness, and leagues. The health and wellness component will include on-going classes like Zumba, a Mommy and Me boot camp, and nutrition education. Leagues will include table tennis, badminton, and croquet.

“Our goal at the YMCA is to strengthen the foundation of the community,” Conklin says. “We see this as a chance to live our work outside of the building known as the Y. We hope to achieve getting people to move and enjoy activities outside.”

The Dallas Regional Chamber also will seize the opportunity to bring some of its own networking and education programs outside. The group was scheduled to kick off its monthly “Meet the Leader” meet and greet this fall. The event is an opportunity for park visitors—from high schoolers and college students to active members of the business community—to hear key business leaders speak on important business topics, and then to interact and commingle with them in a way that wouldn’t otherwise be possible.

“It’s a new way to connect professionals and the community,” says Amy Ramos, managing director of communications for the chamber, adding that the relationship between the two is mutually advantageous. “It’s showing that downtown is vital to the business community, not just to work, but to come to relax. It’s only going to draw businesses downtown, because it improves the quality of life for employees. It’s a wonderful asset.”

A HIGH BAR

Drawing visitors, professionals, and businesses to downtown to connect with one another and to build critical mass for the district is what it's all about. And Klyde Warren Park, it seems, is setting the bar high for parks all across the country.

"Dallas is rising on people's radar," says Lill. "People come, and they are amazed by all the things offered here. There's a lot to be proud of, but the real pride is being able to more tightly knit the core together."