



Fifteen Years Playing in Dirt



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Most DCBIA members remember when everywhere one looked one could see the District of Columbia government struggling to provide even the most basic services. At pretty much every level of City government, there was a tragic drama playing out about corruption and mismanagement, and those who could least afford it being let down. As an organization, DCBIA has always advocated that freedom and prosperity can only come from economic growth. The District's remarkable turnaround is the strongest testament to this truth.

Fifteen years ago, when things seemed the bleakest, several visionaries of the DCBIA leadership made it a priority that DCBIA should be more involved in the community, working hand-in-hand with people who see *our* Washington as distant and unreal; getting to understand their problems and trying to make a difference. So, for the past fifteen years, hundreds of developers, lawyers, brokers, contractors and design professionals have rallied to this cause every September for DCBIA's Annual Community Improvement Day.

As anyone reading this article knows, downtown Washington is undergoing a phenomenal transformation before our eyes. Whole sections of the District seem to be springing out of nowhere. The members of the DCBIA Community Services Committee have had the true privilege to work closely with citizens all around the City over the

years, and if there is one clear message that comes though, it is this: Our work is not over.

Over the past few years, the Department of Parks and Recreation has made enormous strides in modernizing itself and developing outstanding new facilities. But given all of the City's old priorities and the new ideas of the Fenty administration, the problem of neglected park facilities in this city is staggering.

This year we are focused on a particularly special recreation center: The DC Therapeutic Recreation Center on G Street, SE. DC Therapeutic is for all citizens, but it is a unique facility design specifically for the disabled. The Center is adjacent to Fort DuPont Park in a quiet neighborhood not far from the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge. Disabled youth are brought there from all around the city to use its swimming pool, gymnasium and other recreational facilities. It is managed by specially trained staff. The building itself is one of the most imaginative in the DPR system, with a central interior court that is covered by a large space frame truss system that allows natural light to bathe the space during the day. Outdoor facilities include a putt-putt course designed for disabled, picnic areas, a softball field, a basketball court and an open area where local entertainers perform.

The DPR staff has done a remarkable job trying to maintain this facility; however, it is an *overwhelming* job. This park needs our help.

15TH ANNUAL DCBIA COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DAY

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Our major concept is to develop an outdoor facility for all the senses. In a design led by Jim Malone, Heather Daley and Angela Yu of Cunningham & Quill Architects, we are renovating an existing path to serve as a Sensory Garden by providing new beds with different smells and colors (and safe to touch and eat if someone can't resist), wind chimes, exercise stations accessible to all levels of ability and light beacons. The putt-putt course will be renovated and new picnic tables and cookout grilles will be added. The District is providing a new water spray park adjacent to our work.

The interior design effort is being led by Moira Gannon, Ursula Albertini and Lauren Frank of Perkins & Will. The harsh concrete sitting area in the central atrium will be renovated with recycled rubber flooring and cushions. There will be new flowerbeds and a new puppet theater. The kitchen and dining area, where the staff teach important housekeeping skills, will be completely renovated with new cabinets and appliances and furniture. New finishes such as fabric banners and recycled rubber tack panels will provide color and excitement – lots of things for patrons to explore and enjoy.

As this year's event co-chairs, Derek Gallardo of KTA Engineering and Des Burke of Structure Tone, have the unenviable task of pulling together the efforts of dozens of designers, planners, contractors and suppliers who are right now working hard to make this year's Community Improvement Day a memorable one. Working extra hard, once again heading the thankless task of fundraising, is Steve Mutty. And making all the thousands of details come together is DCBIA's Danielle Melus.

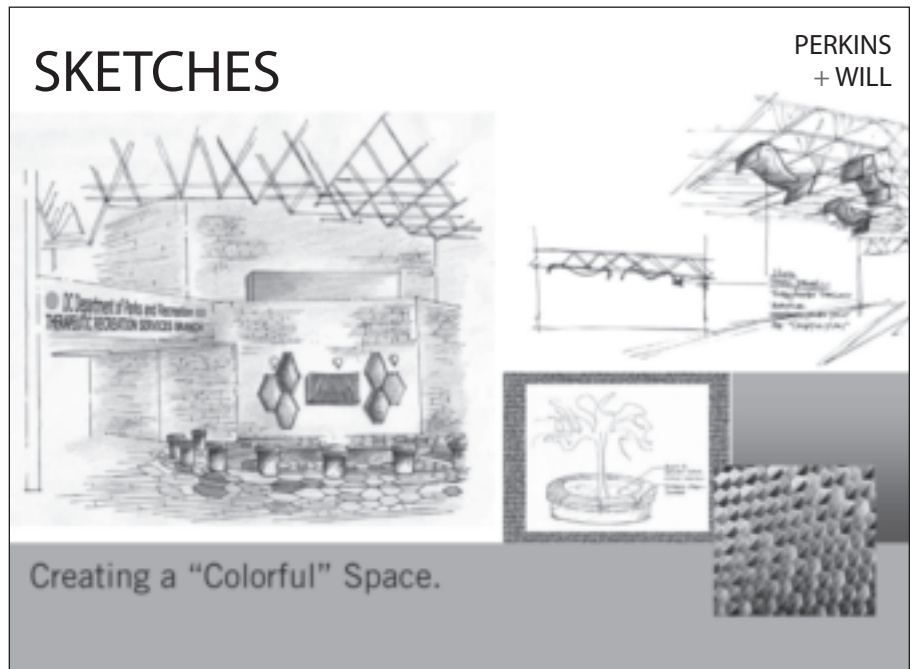
On a personal note, recently I was at the Center taking measurements in the gym. There was a group of mentally-challenged young men, each with a staff member, and they were having just a great time bouncing basketballs and yelling and

running around tethered together with bungee chords. One saw me with my yellow tape measure, limped over and said, drawling slowly, "thank you," and all I could think was – what took us so long?

See you there on September 15th. ▲



DCBIA Community Services Meeting – left to right: Des Burke, Structure Tone, Inc. & Derek Gallardo, KTA Group, Inc., Co-Chairs of Community Improvement Day 2007; Mark Baughman, SKB Architecture & Design, Co-Chair of DCBIA Community Services Committee; and Charles Barber, The George Washington University, DCBIA President.



DC Center for Therapeutic Recreation Atrium – After (Design Concept by Perkins + Will)