

000539

Citizen
Committee
Dwight Hill
10/4/00

Glenn Springs/Ridgeview Demographics

After prayerful consideration the First Assembly of God ACTION Task Force resolved to focus on the needs of the youth near the church. The committee began their research in order to learn and understand the problem...and what could be done to resolve the problem. Shortly after forming, the committee met with the Gainesville Parks and Recreation Department. Initially, this department suggested that we focus on the demographics of the Ridgeview/Glen Spring community. Relationships were made with City Planning, Commissioner Barrow, Parks and Recreation to name a few. Some of the results of our research revealed the following:

- We found that 9,000 persons
- ...and 2,250 families live in the community.
- There are 1,350 children between the ages of 6-17.
- Over one half of the families living in these neighborhoods are at or below the 1990 poverty threshold level.
- One-third of the families are comprised of a female as the head of household in which:
 - Nearly 40% of these families have children under the age of 18.
 - Nearly 80% of the children are under 5 years of age.

Gainesville Police Department

When we met with the Gainesville Police Department they told us that they were very familiar with the Ridgeview/Glen Springs Manor Community and that they were working hard on its crime problems.

- The youth are well informed of the limits of local law enforcement
- The Department has committed staff to address neighborhood crime trends -- and assisting in prevention training
- An active Neighborhood Watch program has been reinstated with active involvement throughout these communities
- The Department is concerned about the lack of visible role models for children to mentor
- Police officers have observed toddler's progress on the street from innocent bystanders to recognized criminal element leaders
- Teenagers are using elementary and middle school children to carryout drug deals and robberies. This is due to the fact that younger children are less likely to be dealt with by the Juvenile Justice system
- Youth perceive property crimes as fun

Parks and Recreation Department

- Programs in Green Tree a.k.a. Kiwanis Park were suspended in 1982 due to increase in crime
- Currently the department's budget is \$4.2 million, one half the amount of departments serving communities of the similar size of Gainesville
- Budget has not changed in 6 years -- except for personnel cost of living raises
- This year the City of Gainesville asked Parks and Recreation to reduce their budget
 - 2.9% this year and...
 - 5% next year.
- Parks and Recreation has 95 full time staff, one half of the staff is designated to maintenance
- Department subscribes to a facility-based philosophy for delivering programs to communities and **NOT** a neighborhood-based philosophy due to the lack of funding for facilities and staffing.
- This has not always been true. The Department of Parks and Recreation use to have a van and truck come to the park during the week and run programs for the children. They discontinued it in 1982 due to a perceived increase in crime and a lack of funding. Since then juvenile crime has become a major dilemma in the community.
- One Parks official said that the city **does not** see the number of lives affected every time a staff person or program is cut.
- The Parks Department has recently developed a "pay for play" philosophy. Families pay \$10 per week per child for daycare programs.
- Westside Park, located in a middle class community charges fees and maintains a waiting list.
- **Recent study by Parks & Recreation reveals that nearly 50% of the people using their programs come from communities outside the City limits.**
- The department does not provide transportation to facility based parks because their programs are always full.
- To offer a program at Green Tree Park would cost \$20,000 -- money the parks and Recreation Department does not have. Commissioner Barrow said that the City of Gainesville has a contingency fund that could be used to start a pilot program in this community. In order for Green Tree Park to receive money and not have it put in the general Parks and Recreation Budget, the City would need to allocate funds designated specifically for Green Tree.
- We were told that Parks and Recreation could develop a program for 20 kids and charge them \$10 a week (\$520 a year) or waive the fee if the families qualified for the free school lunch program. However in a community with over 1,000 children, a program for 20 children is not enough!
- For every dollar invested in youth...\$17 is saved in Juvenile Justice related matters
- Advised that no money was available for facilities. However, since we last met with the Parks and Recreation Department, the media announced funding for 5 skateboard facilities in other communities, release of funds for Westside Park, and

East Gainesville and most recently the consideration of programs in Possum Creek where no facilities or programs currently exist.

Girls Club of Alachua County

We were apprised that the Parks and Recreation Department would not duplicate existing services in the community and that we needed to find out if anyone else was offering programs to youth in the area. The Girls Club of Alachua County is actually located on Park District Property and they have many excellent programs and a beautiful facility created in 1983. However, provide services for girls only and they recruit and pick up these young girls from all over the county.

- Only six girls in Ridgeview and Glenn Springs community participate in the Girls Club.
- Major sources of the Girls Club's revenue come from Program Fees & Incidental Revenue and United Way.
- Programs fees are out of reach for the majority of families living in the adjacent area.
- Softball Teams and a Track and Field Club that also recruit children from all over the city use Green Tree Park.
- We feel a priority must be made for the poor and working families that surround Green Tree Park in order to have a positive influence on this community.

Dr. Stephen C. Anderson
Parks, Recreation and Tourism
The University of Florida

We met with Dr. Anderson to gain from his expertise and wealth of knowledge in this vocation. He is the Department Chair as well as a professional educator who prepares young men and women to enter in to careers in Parks and Recreation.

- Before our meeting with Dr. Anderson, he surveyed Green Tree Park and observed folks in their neighborhoods and adjacent to the park but not using the Park and he will give that to us later tonight but he did tell us that:
- Research data strongly proves that when programs are offered in neighborhoods where children live you will find
 - Children's energy is used more constructively and less likely to be involved in criminal activities
 - Truancy is reduced
 - Grades are improved
 - Youth tend to be more goal directed
- He encouraged community input and that Parks and Recreation staff as well as elected leaders should meet with community folks.
- He said that his department has developed some studies looking at the effect of programs on children's quality of life. His department brings experience,

expertise, faculty, and students (including University Athletic Association) to the table as a valuable resource.

In conclusion, we believe that our research clearly shows that there is an acute need for Parks and Recreation to advance the necessary programs to emotionally and physically advance the youth in Ridgeview/Glen Springs community.