

GREEN SHEET  
January 27, 1979

# Big plans for Rio School park

By Cheryl Downey-Laskowitz  
"You had to be rather persistent."

That's how Joan Fitzgerald describes the efforts of parents to improve the recreational area around Rio del Mar School. A group of dedicated parents, starting from scratch, ended up with \$45,000 to put in soccer and baseball fields, playground equipment and to improve a small, existing park.

Mrs. Fitzgerald provided a large part of the persistence. She is the chairwoman of a volunteer parent committee that was formed in April of last year. The parents took the name of the Rio del Mar School Community Center Committee, an earlier committee that had worked on the Rio del Mar Park next to the school.

With only a name and an idea, the committee got to work. The idea came from someone who had heard of park dedication funds that had to be used in a particular area for parks. Word was that the area including Rio del Mar had \$100,000 that could be tapped for park use.

The concept was to make the school a recreation area

that residents of Rio del Mar could use and enjoy.

"We knew we needed soccer and baseball facilities for our area," said Mrs. Fitzgerald. She made a survey and found recreation areas in the Aptos-Rio del Mar inadequate. Rio del Mar School sits on land that slants up toward a pretty backdrop of hills. The school itself is built on different levels on its hilly site.

On the bottom level, where the parking lot is, a small park was created about five years ago by parents. It consists only of some grass and small trees. The slightly scraggly park sits between another level of the school and someone's backyard.

On the next two levels is the school, with a large field next to the school on the upper one. Sitting above the small park, it is merely a field with grass, although there are large bare spots and some equipment. Basketball courts are next to the field.

Behind the school, on yet another level with the hills almost right behind it, is another field. Part of it is paved, with play equipment in one corner, but the rest is dirt.

Plans developed by the

volunteer committee will convert the primitive fields into soccer and baseball fields with better play areas. The park will have a pre-school play area, benches, picnic tables and, perhaps, a stage.

Proposals for a nature trail and a mini-par course had to be dropped along the way.

The parents worked out a detailed proposal with all the materials that would have to be bought and came up with a project that originally cost \$47,000, later scaled down to \$45,000.

One key to keeping the cost down is that the parents and whatever other volunteers can be rounded up will do all of the labor on the projects.

Although the real physical labor is yet to come, the committee worked pretty hard to get its project approved. Mrs. Fitzgerald and the committee rounded up community support by visiting area organizations to explain the plan and ask for letters endorsing it. Then, armed with the letters and its own detailed plan, the committee got approval from the Pajaro Valley School District, the county Parks and Recreation Commission and then the

county Board of Supervisors, with some aid from Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat.

Despite the fact that Prop. 13 passed in the middle of the committee's campaign, the park dedication funds were still available since they had to be used for parks, according to Mrs. Fitzgerald. Although it caused the committee some worry, the \$100,000 fund was still intact after the passage of Prop. 13 and \$45,000 was awarded to the Rio del Mar group.

The parents really didn't know how much red tape was involved when they started with an optimistic plan to improve the recreation areas at Rio del Mar School, said Mrs. Fitzgerald, but as it turned out, the persistence was worth it.

The first step in the transformation of the fields and park at Rio del Mar School will be the laying of the sod on the two fields to give soccer and baseball players a decent surface.

Mrs. Fitzgerald said they hope to get that put down in February or March, weather permitting. The whole project should be finished by next fall, she said.

A small nucleus of people were the moving force behind the project, Mrs. Fitzgerald said, including Bob Caltabiano, Earl Cantlay, Bev Opdyke and Tony Scherer, who was the one who got the sod at the price the committee could afford to pay. In addition, Principal Jim Follis attended every meeting and presentation, she said, and was behind the project the whole way.

"We kind of worked well together and seemed to have all of the talents," Mrs. Fitzgerald said. In addition, her husband, George, helped and supported her through the project, she pointed out.

This committee was not Mrs. Fitzgerald's first involvement in the school. She has been active there for about five years, since her son started school there. She is a former president of the home and school club and is currently head of the school site council.

Her involvement probably will not end soon, either, since she has a younger child who has yet to start Rio del Mar School.