

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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AROUND THE ARCHDIOCESE

St. Timothy's and COPS/Metro leaders celebrate \$1 million investment for Benavides Park improvements

Written by **Gina Reynoso**, for Today's Catholic

"We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it," Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On care for our common home*

St. Timothy's Parish community came together for a ribbon-cutting April 10 to celebrate a hard-won milestone: the opening of the new "All Wheels" skate park, made possible by years of persistence and sustained effort from parishioners and residents.

Benavides Park was an unsafe vacant lot, becoming one of the first issues St. Timothy's Parish organized around in the early days of COPS/Metro. Parishioners went to the Parks and Recreation Department and secured the bond money needed to clear the land and build the first

iteration of the park. When progress on the park stalled, the community refused to ease up on the pressure, and it was finally opened in the late 1970s. Originally called St. Timothy's Park, it was renamed in 1984 in honor of Father Albert Benavides, found leader of COPS/Metro and the beloved pastor of St. Timothy's, after his passing.

78207 was and continues to be the poorest zip code in San Antonio, and by 2011, the park had fallen into disarray, becoming a haven for drug dealers and prostitution. But as crime rose, so did community action. COPS/Metro leaders again approached the city for the funding needed to improve the park. "We were told we couldn't get any funding until we had a master plan," COPS/Metro leader and St. Timothy's parishioner Linda Davila said. Refusing to back down, she recalls, "So what



did we do? We created a master plan and went back to the city."

That determination resulted in \$400,000 for the park, which built two playgrounds, a splashpad, basketball courts, exercise equipment, and picnic tables. The community knew there was more that could be done. Gabriel Gonzales, a St. Timothy's parishioner who was at the forefront of the struggle to improve the park, noticed that much of the city's bond money was going to Hardberger Park on the North Side. He and his neighbors knew Hardberger was too far for their community to use, so they organized to continue the fight to bring Benavides Park up to a similar standard. After attending countless City Council meetings to advocate for more funds, COPS/Metro leaders secured \$800,000 for Benavides Park from the 2022 bond.

As the bond funds came in, leaders held community meetings to get public input on how to improve the park further: "We wanted to hear directly from children and teens on what they wanted to see at Benavides Park. They spoke up and told us they wanted a skate park and a basketball court with shade to protect them from the sun and rain. I'm glad they are represented here today to see the fruits of engaging in the process," said Gabe Gonzales, a St. Timothy's parishioner. "\$800k couldn't give us both a skate park and shade cover, but we will continue advocating for the funding to get the shade covers," he added.

This neighborhood park, continually improved by community advocacy, remains a gathering place for all ages. The work isn't done, but the fight for what the community needs continues.