



BROOKDALE PARK CONSERVANCY

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6/2/09

Press Interview in Brookdale Park

Thanks to the many park advocates who made this press interview a success for Brookdale Park. Special thanks to those present at the interview and to Goeff Gove, Pat Gilleran, Sue and Rick Mullins, Pat Kenschaft, Vince Bailey, Bruce Simon, Jane Califf, Susan Jankolovitz, and Jackie Albaum.

When a Star-Ledger reporter called up Mary Shaughnessy late on Monday (June 1) to interview her about the paving controversy, Mary set up a meeting with him for early Tuesday morning and made a number of hurried calls for other individuals to take part in the interview, and also notified Mr. DiVincenzo that the interview was to take place. There had been no reply from Mr. DiVincenzo to the email and BPC Board letter sent to him about the dangerous and unwanted path-paving operations. The interview offered a means for concerned individuals to focus public attention on the determination of park advocates to prevent damage to the park.

Before the Star Ledger reporter and photographer reached the site of the interview, Mr. DiVincenzo accompanied by a number of County and Park staff people appeared. Mary and her group, including Toni Spiotta, Mollie Smith, Howard Falk, and Peter Gargiulo walked over to speak to Mr. DiVincenzo, and were greeted with an angry statement from him that he would speak only directly with Park Conservancies and not in the presence of the press.

The park advocates calmly reminded Mr. DiVincenzo that he and his staff had proceeded with the paving project without informing the BPC about his plans. That the BPC had received no invitation to the press conference where Mr. DiVincenzo announced that the project was underway. That he had not replied to the BPC Board message about serious problems with path-paving, and that information about the paving contracts was concealed from the public behind a password in the County website.

Mr. DiVincenzo gradually calmed down. By the time the reporter and photographer reached the Interview site, Joe was apologizing for making paving contract information unavailable, for not inviting the BPC to his paving announcement press conference, for not replying to the Board message about serious problems, and he was also trying to explain why he had not informed the BPC about the paving plans.

Mr. DiVincenzo said there were complaints about the Park roads. Essex County did not have enough funds to do the needed work, so they applied for and got Green Acres grant money (other counties were competing for this money) and combined this money with their funds. There was then enough to do the roadways and more, so they decided to repave the Park pathways.

The Park advocates at the interview reminded Mr. DiVincenzo that that among BPCs 175 members are project managers, artists, landscape specialists, fundraisers, educators, horticulturalists and many other professionals who offer a rich source of ideas. That the BPC provides sweat equity for free to the park, that BPC has been producing high-quality literature, a website for the Park, PowerPoint presentations. And that we were there to offer our help to the County.

Most important: the rapid and strong outpouring of advocates for the park, raising problems about the paving project, demonstrated the intensity of public concern about and involvement with Brookdale Park.

With the press interview underway, Mr. DiVincenzo made these commitments:

- *Mr. DiVincenzo said that the new Glenfield/Hawthorne pathway (which an unnamed resident had requested) will not be paved.*
- *Mr. DiVincenzo and his staff said that, in areas where pathways had already repaved, the edges of the paths would be "feathered" to eliminate the sharp drop-offs with a filling of stones, and grass-seeded earth, covered with hay.*
- *Mr. DiVincenzo said that County plans for path paving and other alterations in the children's playground area would be halted until joint planning between the County and the BPC Master Planning Committee takes place.*