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## After years of broken promises, Hallandale Beach gets state-of-the art park

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MARSHA HALPER / Miami Herald Staff

Guests line the colorful walkway leading to Hallandale Beach's Foster Park Community Center for its grand opening on Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012. The park and its 9,000-square-foot community center has been a long time coming; residents say they have been waiting for a new recreation building in the area for decades. The new building houses a workout center, meeting rooms and a library. An open house followed a ribbon cutting at the park, 609 NW Sixth Ave. An open house followed a ribbon cutting on Saturday morning.

When Anthony Lewis looks at Foster Park's new state-of-the-art recreation facility, he sees much more than just a building.

He sees promises fulfilled. He sees hope for the future. He sees something he has been waiting to see for more than four decades.

"It's about inclusion," said Lewis, 63, a lifelong resident of Hallandale Beach. "It's about knowing we are part of the city."

Lewis, who has lived in Hallandale Beach's historically black northwestern section — dubbed the Palms Community — his whole life, said he's been waiting for a place where he and neighbors could use computers, rent rooms and work out.

"We were always promised things, but we never got anything," said Lewis.

But on Saturday, community leaders and residents cut the ribbon on a new \$1.6 million building which includes a large rental area for weddings, birthdays and other celebrations; a fitness center; and a small micro-library branch focused on African-American and Caribbean culture.

"It sent chill bumps through my body," said Mary June Jones, 70, referring to a "tree" tacked to the wall with the names of long-time Hallandale Beach families etched on gold leaves. Jones, who was there with her two sisters, scanned the tree looking for their father's name Roosevelt Harris, Sr., who moved into the neighborhood in 1923.

"This means so much to our family," Jones said.

On Saturday, the 9,000-square-foot center was buzzing with people checking out the new equipment, meeting rooms and pink-and-lime colored library.

Outside, people came to enjoy the area's first Arts in the Park, sponsored by the city, the Palms Community Action Coalition and the Community Foundation of Broward County.

Christopher Drayton, 24, who works for the Palms Center for The Arts, sat in the library looking at the almost-completed mural he had painted for the children's section of the library. Smiling ear to ear, Drayton, who grew up in Hallandale Beach, said he was proud to have his work shown in the community.

"This means so much to me," he said explaining his mural concept, which includes both African American and Caribbean themes. "It's nice to be able to give back to the community you live in."

But perhaps one of the most significant parts of the center is the history wing, where people can remember the neighborhood which got its identity during the time of segregation.

Murvin Wright, who has lived there more than 50 years, said the northwest section was a place "where everyone knew everyone."

The black community created their own theater, music center and school.

Many of the buildings — and early pioneers — are gone but the history wing will be a place "to let them live," said Wright.

There is also a time capsule — filled with information on city leaders, menus from local restaurants and articles written about the city — that was sealed Saturday and will not be reopened until Sept. 29, 2022.

The community, on the west side of the train tracks between Pembroke Road, Hallandale Beach Boulevard and Interstate 95, has long felt neglected by the city.

City leaders said Saturday that Foster Park was just the start of a renaissance for the city.

Renovations are also scheduled for B.F. James Park, including replacing a pool that was ripped out 20 years ago.

Vice Mayor Antony Sanders, who also lives in the area, said Saturday that Foster Park is something the whole community can take ownership of — especially since most of the work was done by Hallandale Beach-based companies. The city hired local contractors and more than percent of the people who worked on the building live in the city.

"We ought to be proud of this building because we built this building," he said to a chorus of Amen's.