

Communication from Public

Name: Katherine McNenny

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Comments for Public Posting: General Jeff was a longtime friend and mentor of mine. I am submitting the attached document which lists much of his activism regarding Gladys Park in Skid Row. Having this park be renamed in his honor is a wonderful tribute that will endure for generations and encourage pride in the community. I feel honored to have known General Jeff and continue to be amazed at all the lives he has touched. Thank you, Councilman Kevin de León, for putting forward this Motion.



Photo by Ted Soqui

Honoring **“General” Jeff Page’s** **Work In Gladys Park** **Skid Row, Los Angeles**

Born To Lead In 1965, Left A Legacy In 2021

“General” Jeff Page did many things to improve Gladys Park, not only regarding its physical infrastructure, but also to uplift and inspire the people who use it. Knowing he wanted to help people, but not necessarily knowing exactly how, General Jeff moved into the neighborhood to gain an insider’s perspective.

“...in order for me to help the community, I have to learn the community and so I started going to every meeting. I didn’t know anybody in Downtown. So, I’m like, let me go here, this meeting...

...[I] came to Skid Row by choice - strong able-bodied man, leading by example.” - General Jeff¹

General Jeff felt strongly that green space and physical activity were important components for a healthy community, so his early activism focused on connecting with existing grassroots improvement efforts already underway at Gladys Park.

“The only way you can live an active lifestyle is by actively doing stuff. Physical exercise...you get your blood pumping, you know, you’re breathing in oxygen, you get your lungs flowing, get your sweat dripping, sweating out the impurities in your body. Then you have a thirst and a need to put nutrients back in your body so now you get your life... your body moving and living again. So, that’s a major component if we are going to rehabilitate the Skid Row community.” - General Jeff²

He decided to start his own organization and named it “Issues and Solutions”.

“...when I first got here in 2006 I would go sit in on a whole bunch of meetings at the nonprofit organizations in Skid Row...I got so sick and tired of them only talking about the issues. My concept was—let me find the meetings where they’re talking about the issues and the solutions. You know, ‘cause usually they talk about some stuff—complain, complain, complain—okay, that’s it for today...And I’m thinking—when are we going to get to the solutions? That was the impetus for me to name my organization Issues and Solutions. Kinda’ like, remind people, every time they say it, the last thing out their mouth is solutions. Well, that’s subliminal programming on my behalf, to get people to focus on the solutions for Skid Row more so than the issues.” - General Jeff³

In 2006, Gladys Park had crumbing, broken park benches, only a half basketball court with a cracked surface, and wasn’t being cleaned regularly. Although the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) technically had jurisdiction over the park, SRO Housing Corporation had been managing it since 1988 with funds from the Community Redevelopment Agency. While SRO Housing Corp. had made a few aesthetic improvements to the park (i.e., painting the central stage area), many local residents were frustrated with this arrangement and increasingly demanding more. There was an upstart Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League, for example, that needed a full court

¹ Taken from a 2014 Los Angeles Poverty Department “Walk the Talk” video archive transcript of General Jeff.

² Same as footnote #1.

³ Same as footnote #1.

to better play their games. Soon after learning all this, General Jeff began asking questions at City Hall.

“I had no idea that nothing had been done in Gladys Park in 20 years, since 1988. All I know is I take my basketball serious and when I went to that court and saw the baskets leaning and no nets, the balls not even qualified. Where I come from we don’t even call that a basketball that we play with. It is a ball, but you let the kids play with that. Let the youngsters play with that, but serious ball players? These are the poorest conditions. There were two side by side half basketball courts and there were four rotted out chess tables with a bunch of people standing around hovering over them “I got next, I got next,” and I’m thinking, we need more chess tables...we need fitness equipment...” - General Jeff⁴



**Gladys Park
Before Renovation**

Photo from SRO Housing Corporation

Identifying Quimby Funds For Park Improvements

When General Jeff first reached out to RAP to inquire about upgrades at Gladys Park, they told him the park was “dead”.

“...so I contacted them and they basically said, “No. We’re not interested in anything you’re talking about,” and they took it a step further and actually insulted me by saying, “Gladys Park is dead,”...my attitude was—I’m not letting that slide, I’m taking that one personal. I’m the nicest coolest person on the planet, but don’t put me in a position where I’ve got to take something personal cause for one it’s going to be impetus and definitely motivating for me to do what I whatever I’ve got to do and I have no idea how I’m going to come back, but I am going to come back, you can guarantee that...I have to play political chess now ‘cause I already know these cats is not going to move...You insulted me and my community, you know I got to do this.” - General Jeff⁵

A 2007 audit of RAP⁶ revealed millions of dollars in unspent funds allocated for parks. Of this amount, \$16 million was to be used for Downtown parks. General Jeff went on to advocate that City staff direct these Quimby funds to replace damaged and run-down park fixtures over the next couple of years. Today, Gladys Park has several new tables with umbrellas, where people regularly gather to socialize, play dominoes, or just relax.

⁴ Same as footnote #1.

⁵ Same as footnote #1.

⁶ Few parks, but city sits on a pile of green - Los Angeles Times (latimes.com)



Photo by Lynn Rossi



Photo of the renovated Gladys Park from laparks.org/park/6th-gladys-street

Park Water Fountain Replacements

Not only was the furniture in disrepair at Gladys Park, but the water fountain was corroded too - yet another symbol of the longstanding neglect Skid Row suffered from. In May 2008, General Jeff initiated an inquiry to The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) regarding the drinking water at both Gladys and San Julian Parks. This resulted in RAP not only replacing the drinking fountain units, but also most of the adjoining underground pipes at Gladys Park.

“...they talked it over, and they said, you know what, since we haven’t done anything in the park in 20 years, we’re going to go ahead and switch out the water fountain and plus fifty feet of piping in the streets...So, they went big and it was successful and so what I did was I wrote them a thank you note, ‘cause my mama taught me, someone does something for you, you thank them. So I thanked them. I sent it up and down City Hall: Jan Perry, José Huizar, the Mayor’s Office and all these kind of folks, the DWP commissioners and everybody. So they got some good PR, ‘cause at the time they were taking some heat in the media. You know, a lot of water main breaks...so they were like, oh, we really appreciate what you’re doing, you know, and the Rec and Parks they were like, oh, we really appreciate this...And it was like, matter of fact, now let’s revisit the improvement list, ‘cause there was about 15 20 things and they were like, you know what, yeah, let’s look at that thing.” - General Jeff⁷

Christmas in Skid Row/Gladys and San Julian Parks

In December 2008, General Jeff organized a project with the LADWP called “Christmas in Skid Row/Gladys Park” which included a Christmas tree, lights and decorations meant to bring joy to area residents. This project continues to this day in both Skid Row parks, now with the full support of RAP.

The Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League and Nike Basketball Court

The revamping of Gladys Park’s basketball court made perhaps the biggest splash to the people who use the park. The popularity of the Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League allowed General Jeff to successfully enlist both NIKE and the LA84 Foundation (created to manage an endowment from the 1984 Olympic Games) to help fund the court’s transformation.



Photo by Bobby Buck

⁷ Same as footnote #1.

By December of 2008, there was a Grand Opening celebration of the brand-new Gladys Park full basketball court which included an event featuring the Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League versus a team from the Los Angeles Police Department's Central Division. General Jeff created and initiated this Gladys Park improvement project, working directly with RAP.

The Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League, founded by Manuel Compito aka "OG Man", had General Jeff as its Marketing Director, Charles Porter as Commissioner, Sway Ford and Peter Bell as Presidents and Jose Egurbide and Casey Jones as Advisory Board Members. General Jeff was also a player in the League and the only one to be on three (3) Championship teams, all played at Gladys Park - teams "Game Over", "Da Ryders" and "Da Villanz". Hundreds of players participated in the League and contributed to building a strong community at Gladys Park.

"OG provided me with the signs of life that I needed to reassure my willingness to plant roots here and say yes, this is the area that I will do this, and not South Central or anywhere else." - General Jeff⁸



Photos by Lynn Rossi

⁸ Same as footnote #1.



Photo by Gary Leonard

In October of 2009, The Downtown News published a Three-Part Series by Ryan Vaillancourt titled, “More Than Just a Game”, which detailed how “Recovery Works In Many Ways”. From the Series:

“...General Jeff, waves a thick, outstretched arm, calling for the ball. Off the court he’s a prominent Skid Row activist, hell-bent on showing the world there’s more to the neighborhood than drugs, homelessness and despair.”

“Manuel Compito grins, and offers the younger man somewhat of a challenge: “What are you going to do about it? You gonna stay mad? Man, ain’t no losers here. It’s more than just a game.”

“Just last month, a kid recognized Sway on a street corner about a mile from the park and asked him for his autograph. To be recognized, he says, “as that baller from Gladys Park was pretty cool, man.””



Photo by Lynn Rossi



Photos by Lynn Rossi

From a January 5, 2009 Downtown News article titled, “Skid Row Park Gets New Hoops Court”:

“The facility had long consisted of two blacktop, side-by-side half-courts. Now, thanks to an effort by Nike and the LA84 Foundation, the park has a full-length court that was finished on Dec. 20...the foundation and Nike spent about \$17,000 on the court, the surface of which is made from recycled rubber shoes...” “We want it to be a hotspot for basketball players all around L.A.,” said General Jeff, a Skid Row activist and member of the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council who helped organize the project. “The court is actually a Christmas present to Skid Row that gives hope to our community.”

In 2010, the Skid Row 3on3 Streetball League won a Downtowners of Distinction Award, given annually by the Downtown News. The award was presented to the homegrown League because it had created a “safe haven” in Gladys Park.

“A little more than two years in and we were deemed winners. From a psychological standpoint I could see that rattling out through our community, that, hey, we won something. Winners, that was the theme and we were hoping to instill hope and pride in our residents, not just the men, but the women as well.” - General Jeff⁹

⁹ Same as footnote #1.

In light of this impressive success, General Jeff kept pushing the envelope for what was possible in Gladys Park.

“So then from June of 2008 we were done, the basketball court was in by December 2008. So later on the bleachers were there, instead of those old four chess tables—they took those out—we got eight new chess tables...Later on, in 2009, I got some dip bars out there. So we’re still working our way across the park. So the water fountain is done...a Skid Row resident created a half-million dollar project to improve a park that they said was dead, in our own community, so that was my first big hit, my first big notch on my resume as a community activist in our community...at the same time we need to recognize there’s been folks in Skid Row way before me. I’m not the first person ever...oh, look at what I did...it’s not even about me. It’s a body of work and, you know, the Skid Row residents, folks that care about the people who live here have done a lot of tremendous things over the years.” - General Jeff¹⁰



Photo on top left and bottom left by Lynn Rossi / top right and bottom right by Katherine McNenny

¹⁰ Same as footnote #1.

The Formation Of The Skid Row Park Advisory Board (PAB)

Witnessing the positive effect that the transformation of Gladys Park had on the community and understanding that consistent communication between the residents of Skid Row and RAP was necessary, General Jeff went on to lobby hard for the establishment of an official Skid Row Parks Advisory Board (PAB) which would eventually oversee both Gladys and San Julian Parks. There were more hurdles to overcome first. For starters, at the time General Jeff began advocating for a Skid Row PAB, San Julian Park was not yet under the jurisdiction of the City, or by extension, RAP. In fact, San Julian Park was owned by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), and then a successor agency up until 2015, when RAP finally took control of it.



Photo on left by Mel Melcon / top right by Charlene Muhammad / bottom right by Francine Orr

From an October 21, 2015 “Summer Activity Report” from General Manager Michael Shull to Park Commissioners¹¹:

“In the early 1980’s, the CRA acquired property at the intersection of San Julian Street and 5th Street for the development of the San Julian Park. Since its completion, the CRA has operated and maintained the park for the benefit of those living in Skid Row. In 2011, Governor Brown signed

¹¹ laparks.org/sites/default/files/pdf/commissioner/2015/oct21/info.pdf

into law Assembly Bill (AB) X126 which dissolved all California Redevelopment Agencies. With the CRA no longer able to operate and maintain the park, the City Council approved the recommendation to transfer ownership of the park to the Department. On March 19, 2015, the Board of Recreation and Parks Commissioners, through Report No. 15-059, approved the acceptance of the property.”

“On May 4, 2015, Recreation and Parks (RAP) staff met with Jeff Paige [Page], a community activist, and discussed the needs at Gladys Park, the park hours of operation, the needs of the Skid Row Drifters, the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group, drinking fountain, water mainline, and park lighting.”

“On September 1, 2015, RAP staff met with Jeff Paige [Page] and Katherine McNenny, a community activist. They requested to establish a Park Advisory Board (PAB) for San Julian Park. Both Jeff Paige [Page] and Katherine McNenny shared their interest in becoming PAB members. Park improvements were also discussed.”

Having both Skid Row parks under the jurisdiction of RAP was something area activists had wanted for a long time and General Jeff knew that a PAB would help make sure things stayed this way. However, because these parks were designated as “pocket parks” by the City, he encountered some pushback in his fight for a Skid Row PAB. Traditionally, the City only granted PABs to larger parks, such as Pershing Square or Griffith Park. He was told Skid Row’s two (2) parks were too small for a PAB. Yet, General Jeff continued pushing. After listening to several of his impassioned speeches at Park Commission meetings, EXPO Center (designated as an LA Park) Executive Director Belinda Jackson connected with what General Jeff was saying - that Skid Row is a community like others, but one that has unique needs and had suffered from neglect far too long, including its parks which represent a very real lifeline for its residents! She began to work with General Jeff to help make the Skid Row PAB a reality.

On January 26, 2017, General Jeff led community presentations for the National Recreation and Park Association who visited Gladys Park as part of their Los Angeles tour, noting best practices for engaging people experiencing homelessness¹².



(2017 presentation to National Recreation and Park Association) Photo by Michael Blaze

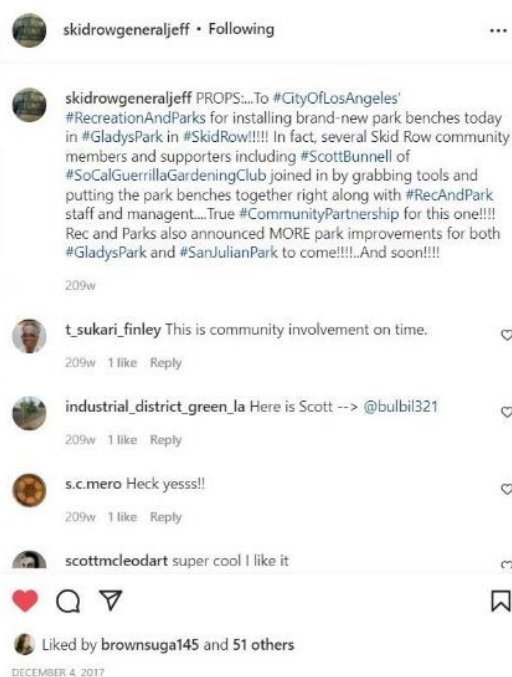
¹² <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/march/los-angeles-innovation-lab-tackles-homelessness/>

In January of 2018, RAP began seeking community members who were interested in joining the Skid Row PAB. After a few delays, the Skid Row PAB held its first meeting in October of 2020. Also in 2020, the revitalization of the Skid Row Parks earned the City of LA a “Creating Community Award of Excellence” from The California Park and Recreation Society¹³.

The existence of a Skid Row PAB¹⁴ is important because it can advocate for needed resources to support the community’s two local parks and receive funds to be utilized for future park improvements and programing. It also embodies the struggle for Skid Row to be recognized as a neighborhood whose parks receive an equitable share of funding and amenities to accommodate the many patrons that frequent them.

Gladys Park Bench-Building Day

General Jeff advocated for both Skid Row parks to receive new park benches in 2017. RAP was onsite at Gladys Park for a day of community-building as local residents helped City staff assemble and install them.



¹³ <https://www.cprs.org/resources/cprs-awards-2020-winners/creating-community-award-of-excellence-2020>

¹⁴ Agendas (listed as Gladys Park and San Julian Park) are posted at: <https://www.laparks.org/volunteer/pab-agendas/2021>. Also see the Skid Row PAB Facebook Page.

Redirected Los Angeles Police Department Funding Towards The Skid Row PAB

The Summer of 2020 brought national, even *international* protests over police brutality and racism for the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man who was killed during an arrest after Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis Police Department officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Black Lives Matter was at the forefront of calls to redirect funding away from bloated and over militarized police departments and towards more community-based solutions, education, and health care.



Photo on left by Alexis Hunley / top right by Jason Armond / bottom right by Lynn Rossi

By July of 2020, the Los Angeles City Council was voting on plans to cut \$150 million from LAPD's budget for the next fiscal year¹⁵, a move that followed activist's mounting calls to "Defund the Police." Specifically, activists wanted this money to be directed towards Black communities. General Jeff reached out to new City Councilman Kevin de León (whose District 14 includes

¹⁵ Los Angeles City Council votes to slash LAPD budget by \$150 million - CBS News

Downtown) to inquire about this funding. When all was said and done, General Jeff was able to secure \$200,000¹⁶ for the Skid Row PAB, to be used for positive programming for years to come.

“...Skid Row is mine. That’s my mindset...let’s keep it one hundred—Skid Row is a fifty block community...from Third to the north, Seventh to the south, Main St. to the west and Alameda to the east, and my mindset is, Skid Row is my first 40 acres and a mule, and I try to spread that mindset through the rest of the community because...I learned from Magic Johnson many moons ago is that it’s all about ownership. If you ever hear about Magic Jonson making any type of business moves, he’s owning something. You know, it’s an ownership move, you know, from the Lakers to the Dodgers to the Sparks just yesterday, Starbucks, TGI Friday’s, movie theaters, whatever it is, he’s owning stuff; even with the Canyon Johnson Urban Development Corporation, he ownership’n. So that’s the mindset we have to be as Skid Row. We have to own our community even though we don’t physically own it yet. We don’t have any deeds in our pocket, but it’s the mindset. ‘Cause that way we’re going to take better care and be more serious about where we live.” - General Jeff¹⁷



Photo by Tommy Oliver

¹⁶ Council File: 20-0600-S83. Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget / Los Angeles Police Department / Reinvest Funds for Impacted Communities

¹⁷ Same as footnote #1.



Photo by Ted Soqui

Donations to the Skid Row Park Advisory Board can be made through the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. All donations will go towards park improvements and programming for both Gladys and San Julian Parks.

laparks.org
221 N Figueroa Street Suite 350
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 202-2633
RAP.PublicInfo@lacity.org

Authored by Katherine McNenny, with help from Manuel Compito aka “OG Man”, Charles Porter, The Los Angeles Poverty Department, and The Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks.

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