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PRESS RELEASE

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SECOND COMMUNITY MEETING SET FOR TUESDAY AT BUTCH DUHE PLAYGROUND

Kenner, LA. – A second community meeting to discuss the proposed change to create a Sports Academy - operated by the city of Kenner at Butch Duhe Playground - will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the gym, 1930 10th St.

An analysis of Kenner’s playgrounds was part of a two-year study by Kenner Recreation Director Ken Marroccoli, Chief Administrative Officer Michael Quigley and 5th District Councilman Dominick Impastato that included visits to other recreation departments throughout the metro area and beyond.

“In the 1960s and 1970s, Butch Duhe was one of the most active playgrounds, but we all know times have changed,” Quigley said. “There is no longer a high concentration of kids living in the neighborhood, and the airport buyout program in the 1980s and 1990 turned nearly 400 homes into vacant lots. This is about recognizing those changes and doing whatever is necessary to serve as many Kenner residents as possible at our playgrounds.”

While participation has declined at a number of gyms in the city, the figures from 2003 to 2015 showed the biggest drop was at Butch Duhe. Last year, only 32 Kenner residents signed up for one of the seven sports programs offered during the year, Marroccoli said. That was down from a high of 363 individual registrations in 2003.

In many cases that has meant kids who signed up were sent to other playgrounds because the numbers were too low to conduct a league at Butch Duhe, Marroccoli said.

Current Butch Duhe parents will be able to choose any playground in the city, Quigley said. “Rules about playground districts just don’t apply anymore. This will expand playground districts, and that’s the only way to get more kids. In many ways, this will make us more like Jefferson Parish as far as the size of the districts surrounding individual playgrounds.”

Quigley and Marroccoli said their study of recreation departments in southeast Louisiana found that all are confronted with the demand for travel ball opportunities in all sports. It is a significant reason why traditional recreational youth sports providers here and around the nation are losing participants. The implementation of the Academy concept is Kenner’s proactive response to the expectations and demands of parents.

There is a demand within the city for these opportunities for travel baseball and academy-like instruction that is currently not being served, Quigley and Impastato said. Providing this opportunity will give an additional recreation opportunity to citizens within the city of Kenner that they don't currently have.

"Our families are going to other cities and other parishes for travel and academies because it's not available in Kenner," Quigley said. "We now have the chance to keep our families playing here in the city."

Impastato said keeping the playgrounds vibrant and in tune with local residents benefits the entire city. "We need to find creative ways to get more kids and more families to use our facilities," he said. "To get our neighborhoods more vibrant and more active, we need kids and families at our playgrounds. Having families at parks benefits the community around that park and makes the area more attractive to residents and those considering moving to Kenner."

"We had two options," Quigley said. "We could ignore what is obviously happening. Or, we can come up with ways to get more kids at playgrounds in Kenner."

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