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Von King Park: The Pride or Shame of Bed-Stuy?

The parks department says that Von King is cleaned regularly, while residents who visit the park daily say the trash and uneven sidewalks are an eyesore.

Bed-Stuy, NY

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By Christopher J. Brooks (Open Post) - (<http://patch.com/users/khristopher-j-brooks>) August 10, 2011 1:13 pm ET | (<http://contribute.patch.com/moderation/225763>)





Scores of people visit Herbert Von King Park every day—people of different ethnicities, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Those who visit the park may not agree on every social and public issue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, but most of them agree on one front: Von King Park needs to be cleaned.

Interviews with Von King regulars and inspection reports from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation indicate that Von King Park is not as clean as it could be.

Local residents would like to see the park's center lawn mowed, a new paint job on the park benches an updated amphitheater, and a beefed up cleaning staff.

Bed-Stuy resident Sujatha Raman, who lives near the park and jogs through it every morning, said she notices how messy the park gets at the beginning of the week.

"On Sunday mornings it's really an eyesore because people seem to have come out on Saturday and they trash the place," Raman said. "It would be great if people would figure out a way to pick up after themselves."

However, Meghan Lalor, a spokeswoman at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation said staff members empty 20 barrels of trash every day and that "the park is also periodically visited by a gardener."

"We currently have 3 staff people assigned to Von King Park Monday through Thursday," Lalor said in a written statement.

"On the other days, the park is serviced by a mobile crew. In addition to all of this, we have daytime and evening crews of Summer Youth Employment staff assigned to do many things in the park, including cleaning, planting, and painting."

It all sounds like a lot. But then, why is the park so unkempt?

In fact, several sections of Von King Park failed (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/herbertvonking/inspections/Bo88>) a cleanliness inspection from the parks department in 2010, including once on March 2 and again on October 15.



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In the March 2 inspection, city employees labeled the trash and graffiti found in the park unacceptable. On October 15, the unacceptable list grew to include litter, the lawns and the sidewalks in the park.

The 7.82-acre park, which features handball and basketball courts, a playground and an open lawn, sits near the center of the neighborhood. It is connected to the Herbert Von King Cultural Arts and Recreation Center (<http://www.nycgovparks.org/facilities/recreationcenters/Bo88>). Several attempts were made to contact the center's manager Lemuel Mial, but he did not return any of our phone calls.

But even without Mial's comments or insight, it is easy to see why parks department inspectors gave Von King Park such a poor grade last year.

The paved road that zigzags through the park has patches of litter, pop bottles, candy wrappers, empty potato chip bags, cans, cigarette cartons, old newspapers and playing cards. There are gaps in the black fence that stencils interior sections of the park.

The paint on the park benches is chipped, cracked and ashy.

The shrubbery lacks trimming, and patches of dirt have developed on land that was once lush green grass. The grass along the edges of the park have grown taller than a mid-sized sedan.

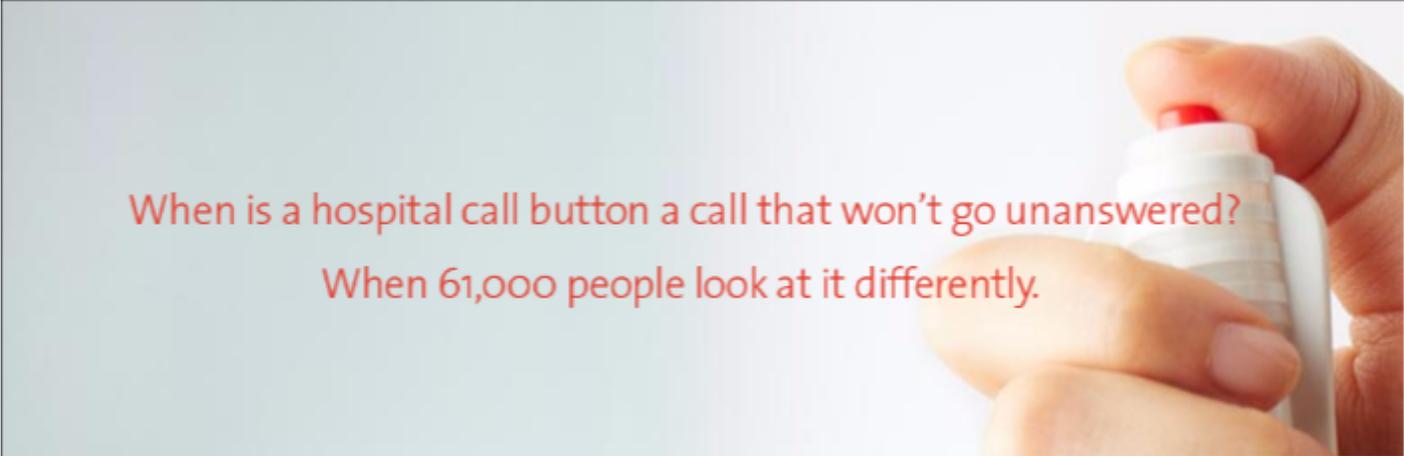
A sign posted on the fence of the baseball field reads "Clean Up or You're Out." Underneath the sign is an empty sports drink bottle.

Still, local residents visit the park every day. They say they have learned to ignore the trash and overgrown grass. Some residents say they avoid certain parts of the park because of the trash.

Bed-Stuy resident Quaniesha Clark, said the park benches and the steps to the amphitheater each need a fresh coats of paint and the water fountains should be re-built.

"The first thing you think of when you're going to a park is 'Oh, it's gonna be nice and there'll be trees and grass and it'll be nice.' Not up in here," said Bed-Stuy resident Tacara Tate, who visits the park four times a week. "This is a big park. It should look nice."

This is the first in a three-part series/exposé on Von King Park. In the next



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