

# A vision becomes a park for tots

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STAFF WRITER

**C**ARLSBAD — Chubby little hands hold tightly to the swings' chains as toddlers sway gently to and fro.

Sneakered feet run through the sand, and heads dart in and out of a large plastic boat during an impromptu game of chase. Shrieks and giggles — and the inevitable cry or two — fill the morning air.

Diane Brink stands on the edge of the small park set in a grove of towering eucalyptus trees and surveys the scene playing out before her.

"These children love this park," Brink says. "Many of them come every day, sometimes twice. Finally, they have a place like this that's within walking distance of where they live. Every neighborhood with children should have a park like this."

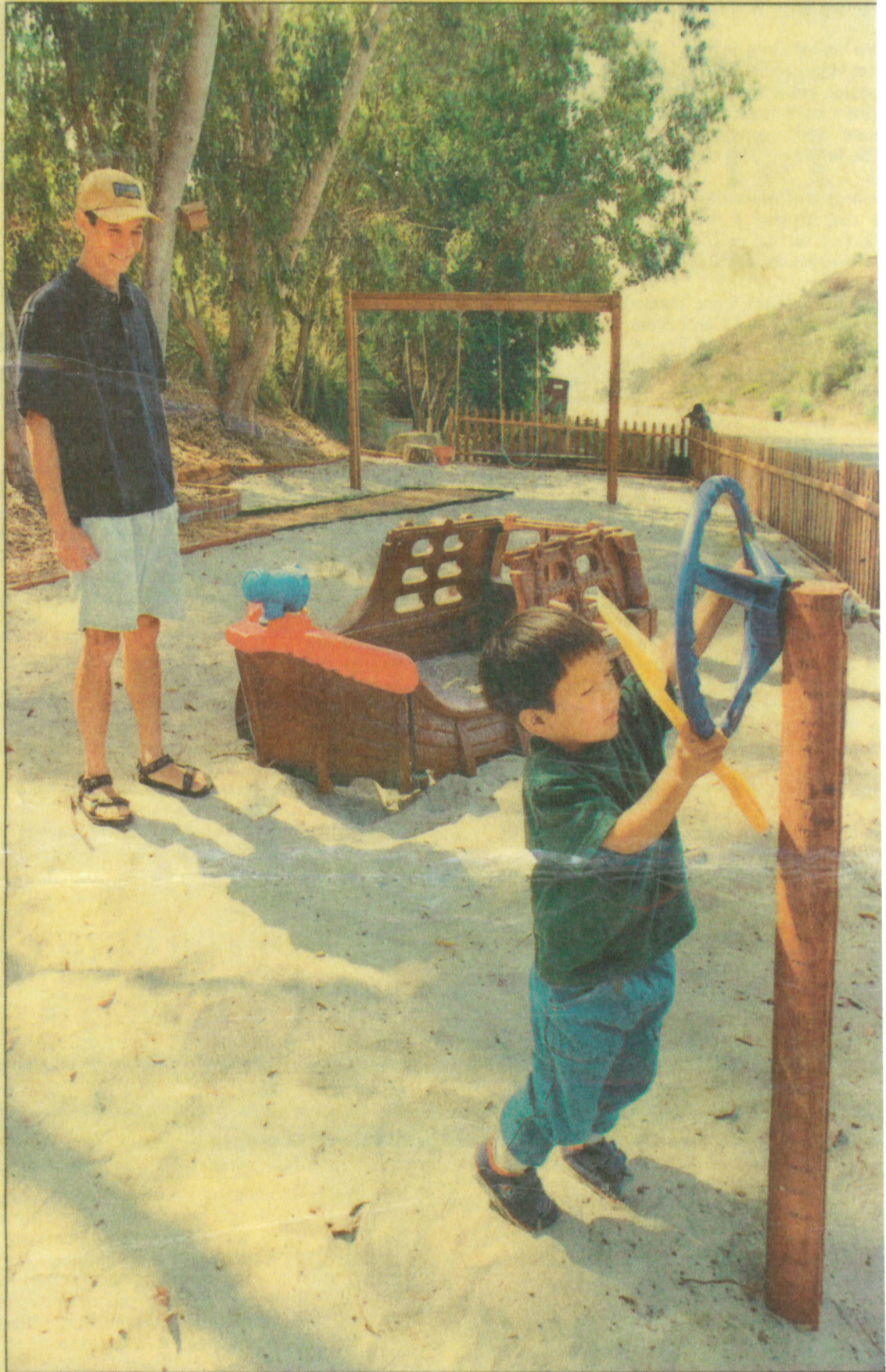
Until recently, Brink's 350-home Spinnaker Hill neighborhood north of Batiquitos Lagoon had no such park. And, without the dedication of Brink — a wife and mother of two who works full-time selling research equipment — it probably still wouldn't.

"If it weren't for Diane, this park wouldn't be here," says Shirley Harpold, Brink's neighbor and friend.

The park, Brian E. Harpold Tot Lot, is named after Harpold's 15-year-old son, who died three years ago in a motorcycle accident in the neighborhood. The park is adjacent to Batiquitos Drive just south of Poppy Lane.

"There were so many times when I think anyone but Diane would have given up," Harpold says. "But she never did. She had a vision, and she saw it through."

Brink's idea for the park, built on



CHARLIE NEUMAN/Union-Trib

**Lots for tots:** Joshua Chu, 2½, plays at his neighborhood's new Tot Lot while his dad, Neal Chu, watches. Dad and son come to the park regularly.

# Playground

Neighborhood needed park — so they built one

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a 30-foot by 150-foot section of a hilly one-acre parcel, was formed nearly five years ago when she went looking for a neighborhood park for her daughter, a toddler at the time.

"There was no park that you could just walk to and spend an hour or even less," Brink recalls. "It really made it seem like the neighborhood was missing something. Other parents of young children felt the same way."

So Brink decided to ask the city to build a park.

"I guess I was naive, but to me it seemed like a pretty simple request," Brink says. "Boy was I mistaken."

City park planners responded to Brink's proposal with a list of concerns. Chief among them were liability and cost.

"They rejected it out of fear," Brink says. "They kept saying, 'What if?' But I wasn't going to stop the project based on 'What ifs.'"

The city's Parks and Recreation Commission twice rejected Brink's plan. Part of the reason was that the city was no longer in the business of building neighborhood parks.

But, each time, Brink went back to the drawing board. Soon, word of her efforts spread, and neighbors and local businesses rallied to help.

Fund-raisers were held. Checks were sent. A bank account for the would-be park was opened.

"There were a lot of setbacks," Brink says. "But there was also so much support in the neighborhood and the community. And, by then, I was like two years into it, and I just couldn't give up.

"Plus, I had lot of people's money. That's what really bothered me.



CHARLIE NEUMAN/Union-Tribune

**Vision fulfilled:** Diane Brink planned, raised money for and built this neighborhood park, which opened in February and is maintained by volunteers.

## COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

► **THE PROBLEM:** Residents of the Spinnaker Hill neighborhood in Carlsbad had no park for young children within walking distance of their homes.

► **A SOLUTION:** Residents and local businesses donated money, time and talents to build the **Brian E. Harpold Tot Lot**. The city granted a permit for the park to be built on city land.

► **TO LEARN MORE:** To find out more about how Spinnaker Hill residents saw their park through to reality, call 431-5442.

to build the park on city property on the condition that the city evaluate the park's patronage and safety record, among other things, after a year. The park opened in February and was officially dedicated in May.

of its kind in Carlsbad to be built by residents.

"We built the park for so little money because so much of the materials and labor were donated," Brink said.

Developers of the nearby Aviara development donated bulldozers to clear the land and then hauled over boulders for the park's landscaping.

"They're our neighbors, and this was the right cause, and it wasn't any trouble at all for us to help out," said Dennis Whitmer, construction superintendent at Aviara.

And Randal Jay Ehm, a San Diego architect who earlier remodeled a home in Spinnaker Hill, designed the park for free.

"Community projects like this pop up now and again, and I get involved because I need all the positive energy I can get," Ehm said. "The way I see it, good seeds planted bring good things to good people."

The owner of a North County sign company — a self-described "teddy bear when it comes to chil-

naker Hill. Established 1996." On the back, it reads: "Brian Harpold, 1977-1993, Gone but not forgotten. Beloved by his family, Don, Shirley, Ann Lisa."

"Diane barely even knew us when she took an interest in honoring our dead child in this way," Harpold said, her voice thick with emotion. "I'm happy that Brian is remembered and not forgotten in the neighborhood where he lived and died."

The park is operating on a 6-month \$1 million liability insurance policy that Brink bought for \$350 with donated money. The policy expires this month.

Later this month, Brink plans to ask the parks commission to "adopt" the park and take over its liability and maintenance.

"It's a big responsibility, and we think it's time for the city to take over the park," she said.

Currently, Brink and other neighbors who frequent the park remove its trash, rake leaves out of the sand and do whatever other

tist said he was impressed by a small number of professional members involved in running a convention, describing the convention as smooth and well-oiled.

"The way the professionals organize, mobilize and train volunteers is useful for us" in Uruguay, he said.

On the other hand, Fernández said he was disappointed because he was unable to meet Jack Ford, the executive director of the committee. A minor illness of Ford's forced the cancellation of their planned meeting.

Fernández said he had hoped to hold substantive discussions with Ford that would help the U.S. center Colorado Party move toward the center of the Uruguayan political spectrum.

Later, Fernández took a decision that will almost certainly be repeated by other guests of the information agency. He toured the U.S.-Mexico border, at the Ysidro port of entry and at B. Field State Park.

Fernández expressed amazement at the long lines of vehicles streaming through the border, also wanted to learn about the border fence, which he said had escaped the attention of the Guayan press.

The nonprofit International Council of San Diego is providing logistical support for the information agency's guests. The council will be sorely tested by

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