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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 18, 2021

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**Mayor Fulop Opens Brand New Bethune Park in Bergen-Lafayette,
Expanding Outdoor Recreation and Open Space for Residents of All Ages**

Decades in the Making, Ward F Park Expands Local Community Center’s Youth and Family Programming

“If we have the courage and tenacity of our forebears, who stood firmly like a rock against the lash of slavery, we shall find a way to do for our day what they did for theirs.”
– Mary McLeod Bethune

JERSEY CITY - Mayor Steven M. Fulop joins Ward F Councilman Jermaine Robinson, Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center, Jackson Hill SID, Jersey City Parks Coalition, and community members to cut the ribbon for the brand new Bethune Park, located along MLK Drive. After decades of talk and little action to move the project forward, the new park will now be open to the public and widely utilized by neighborhood residents as well as the Bethune Community Center across the street and the surrounding Jackson Hill business district.

The entire park design process was highly collaborative with the local community, Jackson Hill Special Improvement District (SID), and City Council members directly involved. Throughout the park, numerous elements incorporate the legacy of Mary McLeod Bethune for this community and the City at large.

“We’ve seen the need for outdoor recreation in urban areas grow exponentially, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and this newest park will serve as a valued extension of the Bethune Center to allow for more outdoor entertainment and children’s programming,” said Mayor Fulop. “I’m proud that we were able to work with the community to get this park opened as it is an incredible asset and addition for the entire community.”

The \$3.5 million park, funded by Community Development Block Grant and capital funding, includes an amphitheater/concert stage, open-air pavilion, shaded seating area, gaming tables, a playground, and exercise equipment. The park will be used for recreation, celebrations, farmers’ markets, and other community events. A new parking lot with electric vehicle charging stations was also built nearby to preserve the existing supply of parking.



“After years of planning, I’m proud that we finally found a way to transform this underutilized space into a usable park for Ward F families and the nearby Bethune Center,” said **Ward F Councilman Jermaine Robinson**. “I knew that for a new park to succeed, it would have to be strongly connected to the activities at the Bethune Center. Now we have another outdoor space in Ward F where residents can come together to play, exercise, gather with friends, and watch local artists perform.”

Since the start of his tenure, Mayor Fulop has made park improvements a top priority, from lobbying for the Open Space Trust Fund to enacting the ordinance in 2016. Despite the unprecedented challenges surrounding the pandemic this past year, in addition to the largest widespread parks improvement project in decades utilizing Open Space Trust Funds, several brand new parks have been established, including Bethune Park (Ward F), Skyway Park (Ward B), Triangle Park (Ward A), Fairmount Park (Ward F), and Oak Street Park (Ward F).

The new Bethune Park is an incredible asset and addition for the community and an additional element for the Bethune Center. The Community Center will hold many classes and performances that use this park as an outdoor space for music concerts, yoga sessions, physical fitness classes, poetry readings, art lessons, among other family and community programming.

“The new park brings the Bethune Center full-circle. Bethune Park is unique because it is specifically designed to reflect the cultural, educational, and wellness activities that take place daily within the Center. These were also the guiding principles of the great civil rights activist for whom the park is named after,” said **Alvin Pettit**,

Bethune Center Director. “Every detail was meticulously thought out to achieve the best design possible for an outdoor space of this size. I am proud to say that the Bethune Center is no longer just a facility, but is now a designated central area of enjoyment for the surrounding community and all of Jersey City.”



have long-term positive health and well-being for all residents. We’re pleased to know that the community can experience both nature and active play at one location,” said **Paula Mahayosnand, President of the Jersey City Parks Coalition**.

The Fulop Administration continues to focus on the direct needs of Jersey City’s dynamic neighborhoods, which is especially evident in Bergen-Lafayette, where more has been invested into the area’s revitalization than any other administration in decades.

“Already this year, two dozen parks citywide have been renovated and upgraded through the Open Space Trust Act, which we implemented in 2016. Bethune Park is a great addition to the City’s open space and parks infrastructure, and will especially benefit the local residents by providing a unique outdoor space and recreational activities for kids of all ages,” said **Mira Prinz-Arey, Ward B Councilwoman and Open Space Trust Committee Chairperson**.

A nine-foot-tall bronze monument honoring civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune will be added to the new Bethune Park upon its completion in the upcoming months. The statue of the monumental figure will be placed at the park’s main entrance as a focal point of the new park and also with the intention to spark curiosity amongst viewers to engage further into her legacy.

About The Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center:

The Bethune Center, located in the Greenville area of Jersey City, NJ, has become an epicenter for artistic expression and inspiration, offering visitors of all ages an unparalleled experience to engage in cultural, fitness, and educational activities, many of which are free to the public. We are a city owned and operated facility dedicated to preserving the legacy of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, by implementing the principles that she embodied.

Our spacious interior and exterior layout is designed for multi-use function, in order to meet the various needs of a diverse community. Aside from our unique city funded programming, we also serve as a rental venue for public forums, career training, seminars, event space, and more. Our useful amenities and staff hospitality has resulted in the Bethune Center becoming one of Jersey City's most recognizable hubs for social interaction. Continuing to provide a welcoming environment that promotes, learning, wellness, and creativity is our ongoing mission.

All media inquiries should be directed to Kimberly Scalcione at KScalcione@jcnj.org.