

RESULTS SOUGHT **MY SERVICES** **MY EXPERIENCE**
DOWNLOAD FACTSHEET **JOIN MAILING LIST**

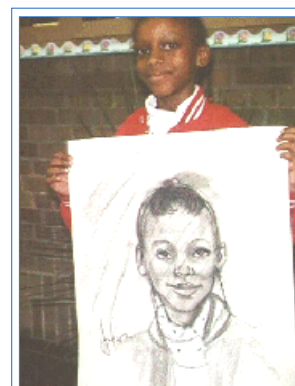
Turning a 70 year old Park into a Community Cultural Center



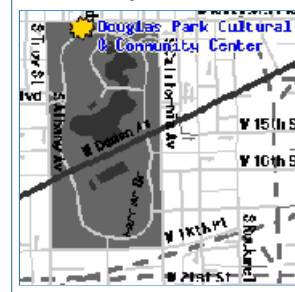
Tom Tresser's 1996-97 Work for the Chicago Park District.

The Chicago Park District has 552 parks covering 7,400 acres and containing 259 field houses. One of the largest parks is **Douglas Park in North Lawndale.**

North Lawndale is a low-income, African-American community. Douglas Park dates back to the 1870's and the field house was built in 1927. There was a fair amount of gang activity in the area, which was experiencing a great deal of new residential building and commercial activity. The level of programming in the park was minimal and many neighbors felt cut off from the park and gave it low marks for service and security.



Postcard showing the Douglas Park Lagoon, 1913.



In September 1996 I was hired by Efè McWorter, the senior culture and arts programmer for the Chicago Park District to create a strategic plan for turning Douglas Park into a community cultural center.

In order to create the type of community arts center that would be attractive to young people, take advantage of the many existing community programs and overcome people's negative perceptions of the park, we had to establish a new sort of dialog with the community and show that there was new direction and spirit at the park. I met with over 70 community leaders, artists, youth service workers and representatives of neighboring organizations.



Over the first year, we held over 60 community meetings, large forums, small group planning meetings and special planning meetings at the park. We established a number of committees to help guide our new programming efforts. On April 19, 1996 we held an all-day Renaissance Celebration with performances by a number of park based ensembles, food, African drumming, speeches by politicians and community organization leaders and hands-on arts activities by a team of volunteer artists. The master of ceremonies was the supervisor of the newly proclaimed Douglas Park Cultural & Community Center, Roscoe Danzy, a professional musician with a long history in the

recording business and someone who has been doing innovative music and cultural programming in Chicago parks for a number of years.

These include: a 30 member community choir; classes in violin, piano, drumming, wood working, ceramics, acting, singing, classical dance, hip-hop dance, crafts and painting; a year-long training program that taught young people the basics of the recording industry; a summer gospel festival produced in association with local churches; a huge "Back To School" festival produced with Alderman Michael Chandler and WGCI-FM; an artists-in-residence program; a youth leadership program with Latino Youth, Inc.; a community gardening program; community theater productions; Gallery 37 at Douglas Park; Ravinia Music Festival Collaboration and training program; Concerts in the Park; Caribbean Festival by the Lagoon...and much more!



[My Manifesto](#) [Teaching](#) [Training](#) [Speaking](#) [Writing](#) [Press](#)
["The Creativity Imperative"](#)