

East Bay park may be renamed after famed San Francisco 49ers football running back

By Eve Mitchell Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

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PITTSBURG -- City officials want to rename Stoneman North Park to honor a former Pittsburg High School football star who played for the San Francisco 49ers and was named to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

John Henry Johnson, who died last year in Tracy at the age of 81, also played for the Detroit Lions, Pittsburgh Steelers and Houston Oilers during his career. Johnson was a running back and a member of the 49ers' famed "Million Dollar Backfield" in the mid-1950s.

Stoneman North Park would be called John Henry Johnson Park provided the City Council officially signs off on the proposal later this year.

"I knew him as a kid growing up. He was a friend of my family," said Contra Costa Supervisor Federal Glover, who grew up in Pittsburg.

"I think it's great when we recognize our heroes, and he is certainly one that is a hero here in the Pittsburg community. He played football here, and he had a great impact on many in the community. He was also a person whose demeanor was welcoming and served as a mentor for many. His legacy will live on in Pittsburg, and certainly he is one who is worthy of that."

In 1987, the year Johnson was named to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the City Council changed the name of a frontage road that provides access to the park from Golden Park Road to John Henry Johnson Parkway. After Johnson's death, several residents suggested to the city that a more prominent remembrance of Johnson would be appropriate.

A new name isn't the only thing that is coming to the park.

Plans are in the works to replace old playground equipment in two play areas, thanks to \$164,175 in state grant funding the city received recently. Lighting improvements will also be made as result of \$50,000 in development fees used to support park improvements.

One of the park's three playground areas has already been improved, said Don Buchanan, Pittsburg's director of recreation and maintenance services.

"The focus at this point is replacement of two of the three park playgrounds. This park is in need of an upgrade in that area. We will replace the playground equipment," said Buchanan, adding that work on the two old playgrounds will be similar to the improvements already done at the third playground.

The proposed name change will be taken up at a Sept. 5 meeting of the Community Advisory Commission, which among other things, advises the council on recreation and park issues. Council members are expected to act on the commission's recommendation at a later meeting.

Reach Eve Mitchell at 925-779-7189. Follow her at [Twitter.com/EastCounty_Girl](https://twitter.com/EastCounty_Girl).

IF YOU GO

What: Pittsburg's Community Advisory Commission will discuss a proposal to change the name of Stoneman North Park to John Henry Johnson Park.

When: 7 p.m. Sept. 5

Where: Council Chamber, 65 Civic Ave., Pittsburg

1929-2011

Born: Nov. 24, 1929, in Waterproof, La.

High school: Pittsburg

College: Saint Mary's, Arizona State

Pro career: Drafted in 1953 by Pittsburgh Steelers in second round. Played one year in Canada, then with 49ers (1954-56), Detroit Lions (1957-1959), Steelers (1960-1965) and Houston Oilers (1966).

Pro statistics: Rushing -- 6,803 yards, 48 TDs; receptions --186, 1,478 yards, 7 TDs

Pro Bowl: 1954, 1962, 1963, 1964

Hall of Fame: Class of 1987