

= Ping Tom Memorial Park =

Ping Tom Memorial Park (Chinese : ???????) is a 17 @. @ 24 @-@ acre (6 @. @ 98 ha) public urban park in Chicago 's Chinatown neighborhood , in South Side , Chicago . It is part of the Chicago Park District (CPD) .

Located on the south bank of the Chicago River , the park is divided into three sections by a Santa Fe rail track and 18th Street . Currently , only development in the area south of 18th Street has been completed . It was designed by Ernest C. Wong of Site Design Group and features a pagoda @-@ style pavilion , bamboo gardens , and a playground . The park is named in honor of prominent Chinatown businessman and civic leader Ping Tom ; a bronze bust of Tom is installed near the park 's pavilion .

= = History = =

In 1962 , the construction preparations for the Dan Ryan Expressway demolished the only two parks in the Chinatown area (Hardin Square and Stanford Park) . Sun Yat @-@ sen Playlot Park , a small , 1 ? 3 acre (1 @, @ 300 m2) park , was created in the mid @-@ 1970s , however , the community wanted a larger open park space .

A private real estate firm formed by Ping Tom , then purchased a former 32 @-@ acre (13 ha) rail yard in 1989 . After construction of Chinatown Square began on this property , the CPD purchased approximately 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m2) of unused land along the Chicago River in 1991 , along with an additional 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m2) that extended along the river , north of 18th Street .

The southern @-@ half of the area then underwent significant development , as the retaining wall along the river was repaired and an @-@ grade rail crossing was installed at the park 's western boundary . Construction then began in 1998 and concluded in fall 1999 at a total cost of \$ 5 million . The park was officially opened on October 2 , 1999 .

In 2002 , the Chicago Park District acquired 5 acres (20 @, @ 000 m2) additional immediately east of the park 's undeveloped northern half . The second development @-@ stage of the park 's nearly 11 acres (45 @, @ 000 m2) undeveloped north of 18th Street was completed in 2011 , and included development of the area 's shoreline and access points . In September 2009 , a \$ 10 million budget was approved to start development on the 6 @-@ acre (24 @, @ 000 m2) area along the Chicago River . The boathouse was opened on June 9 , 2013 , while the field house was opened later that year on October 14 , 2013 .

= = History = =

In 1962 , construction preparations for the Dan Ryan Expressway necessitated the demolition of Hardin Square and Stanford Parks , the only two public parks that serviced the Chinatown community . In the mid @-@ 1970s , a small , 1 ? 3 acre (1 @, @ 300 m2) park was developed on a strip of land between 26th Street and the Stevenson Expressway ; the Chicago Park District purchased the park in 1977 and named it Sun Yat @-@ sen Playlot Park . However , in a 1992 study , 75 percent of Chinatown 's community leaders and 49 percent of business leaders felt that " the lack of open space in the Chinatown area is one of the most serious problems facing the community " , and both groups ranked it first among 15 community issues , including crime , education , housing , and employment . Community efforts to construct a larger park were impeded both a lack of funds and the absence of any suitable site .

After fighting for decades for the construction of a new park in Chinatown , civic leader Ping Tom formed the Chinese American Development Corporation (CADC) , a private real estate firm , in 1984 . Five years later , the firm purchased a former 32 @-@ acre (130 @, @ 000 m2) Santa Fe rail yard and began construction on Chinatown Square , a \$ 100 million residential and commercial development project . However , the 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m2) area along the Chicago River was left untouched . The Chinatown community then formed the Chinatown Riverside Park Advisory Council to work with the Chicago Park District to assess the possibility of developing the remaining

area into a public park . With the support of Park District Commissioner Raymond Lee , the Park District approved the proposal to purchase the land , along with an additional 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m2) that extended along the river northward to 16th Street in 1991 .

Tom died of pancreatic cancer in July 1995 ? three years before construction of the park began . During a Chinatown Chamber of Commerce meeting held in March 1998 , the Riverside Park Advisory Council suggested renaming the park in honor of Ping Tom , the driving force behind the its creation . The request was approved on August 3 , 1998 , and the park was renamed Ping Tom Memorial Park . The park was dedicated and officially opened by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley during a ceremony on October 2 , 1999 . In 2005 , the CADC and friends of the Tom family commissioned sculptor Liao Huilana to create a bronze bust of Ping Tom . The bust was dedicated and installed at the park on October 22 , 2005 .

= = Design and construction = =

Ernest C. Wong of Site Design Group designed the park . Having designed landscape along Chinatown 's Cermak Avenue , Wong was familiar with the community and invited the public to voice their opinions and ideas for the future park . The park 's original design called for walled plazas inspired by traditional Chinese gardens in Suzhou , China . This design was scrapped , however , because of security and vandalism concerns . Instead , a system of pathways was created to link defined spaces and mimic courtyards .

A pagoda @-@ style pavilion based on a structure that Wong had seen in Suzhou is located near the park 's western boundary ? the Chicago River . Site Design Group designed the pavilion 's ornamentation and railings and obtained its traditional Chinese roof tiles from a source in Japan . The park 's entrance is marked by four 20 feet (6 @. @ 1 m) -tall columns , each etched with Chinese dragons and is modeled after a traditional Chinese courtyard . The park contains Chinese @-@ influenced gardens that include ginkgo trees and bamboo . A children 's playground is located at the north end of the park .

Businesses in Chinatown attempted to raise \$ 200 @, @ 000 to build an 11 @-@ story bell tower pagoda at the south end of the park . The tower was planned to be constructed of brick and stone with a hollow interior . While visitors would not have been able to climb the structure , they would have been able to walk through an entrance at its base . Chicago Sun @-@ Times writer Lee Bey believed the bell tower to be the park 's most important feature . Despite the Taiwanese government making an early commitment to help finance the tower , it was never constructed .

Before construction of then @-@ named Chinatown Riverside Park could begin on the strip of land south of 18th Street , the area required significant development . The entire western boundary of the park is a functioning Santa Fe rail track . After unsuccessfully looking into possible underground or overground access , an at @-@ grade rail crossing was constructed . The US Army Corps of Engineers was then needed to restore the badly deteriorated shoreline of the Chicago River , the park 's eastern boundary . At a cost of \$ 2 million , the project improved approximately 1 @, @ 000 feet (300 m) of the retaining wall and lowered the shoreline considerably from its previous position 10 feet (3 @. @ 0 m) above the river . The land was also tested for any harmful contaminants from prolonged use as a rail yard . Once development was complete , construction began in 1998 and concluded in fall 1999 at a total cost of \$ 5 million .

= = = Expansion = = =

In 2002 , the Chicago Park District acquired 5 acres (20 @, @ 000 m2) additional immediately east of the park 's 6 @-@ acre (24 @, @ 000 m2) undeveloped northern half . With the acquisition of this land , the CPD planned a second development @-@ stage ? dubbed " Phase II " ? of the park 's nearly 11 acres (45 @, @ 000 m2) undeveloped . The plan called for the development of the area 's shoreline and access points , as well as the construction of a cultural arts and recreational facility and a boathouse . The estimated cost was \$ 38 million .

In September 2009 , the Chicago Park District ? s Board of Commissioners entered into an

agreement with the City of Chicago that approved the transfer of \$ 10 million in tax increment financing (TIF) funds for the development of the park 's 6 @-@ acre (24 @,@ 000 m2) area between the Chicago River and the Santa Fe rail track north of 18th Street . These funds were used to build a retaining wall , fish habitats and sections of natural shoreline along the area 's 875 ft (267 m) of shoreline along the Chicago River . Open lawn and landscaped areas were developed along with a fishing station and various pathways .

Approved also was an ordinance that finances the construction of an athletic field house in Ping Tom Memorial Park . Funds for the \$ 10 million proposal will be allocated from the River South TIF district . This approximately 28 @,@ 000 @-@ square @-@ foot , single @-@ story , steel frame and precast construction building will include a natatorium , gymnasium , club rooms , a fitness center , and locker rooms .

On September 19 , 2011 , Mayor Rahm Emanuel held a press conference in the newly opened expansion of the park to announce a plan to build a series of boat houses along the Chicago River .

At about this time , the phase two five acre riverfront expansion located to the north of the existing park expanded the park to the north of the 18th street bridge . It was also designed by Site Design Group , and features a 300 linear foot boardwalk with iconic red Chinese ornamental railings that extends over the water , as well as unique decorative limestone rocks called scholar 's stones from Lake Tai in China . Native plantings and oak savanna restoration provide a sustainable planting palette , welcoming native wildlife to the park . The project cost was \$ 4 @.@ 9 million .

On June 9 , 2013 , Mayor Emanuel officially opened the boathouse .

On October 14 , 2013 , Mayor Emanuel officially opened the Ping Tom Memorial Park Fieldhouse , a 30 @,@ 000 square @-@ foot facility with a gymnasium , natatorium , fitness center , and meeting rooms . At the entrance to the fieldhouse stands a stainless steel sculpture called " Stone Talk , " donated by the city of Shanghai on June 3 , 2015 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Sister City relationship between Chicago and Shanghai .

= = Events = =

The Chicago Dragon Boat Race for Literacy , started in 1999 , is a philanthropic event held annually at Ping Tom Memorial Park . Every summer , teams participate in a dragon boat race tournament along the Chicago River while music , food and entertainment is provided for spectators . The proceeds raised from the event are used to support and promote local literacy , cultural , and diversity programs . The park also acts as the finish line to the Chicago River Flatwater Classic , an annual 7 @.@ 25 @-@ mile (11 @.@ 67 km) canoe and kayak race .

In 2004 , the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce used hosted a free series of movies and concerts during their " Summer Fun in Chinatown " campaign . In late September , the Chicago @-@ based Redmoon Theater performed Sink . Sank . Sunk ... , an outdoor play at the park . The performance was the first in an annual series of site @-@ specific plays created to introduce audiences to undiscovered , often @-@ overlooked Chicago locations . The performance included floating props in the Chicago River and also incorporated the park 's active , surrounding trains into the act .

The season 6 finale of CBS 's reality show The Amazing Race ended in Ping Tom Memorial Park . Contestants were instructed to make their way to the finish line in the park from a Gino 's East pizzeria ; however , after contestants hailed taxis , most of the drivers did not know where the park was located .