

Daily Pilot

Poetry plays a concrete role in the revitalization of Costa Mesa's Brentwood Park



Jose E Davila smooths out a concrete path embedded with lines of poetry leading to a new playground at Brentwood Park in Costa Mesa Tuesday. (Eric Licas)

By [Eric Licas](#)

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The musings of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca and Costa Mesa Poet Laureate Danielle Hanson are being embedded into a newly revitalized Brentwood Park as an invitation to the community.

Crews on Tuesday were installing the finishing touches at the site, including the pressing of short poems into the concrete paths leading into the playground area. The works were chosen for their themes of discovery and appreciation for the natural world.

The poetic installations invite visitors to explore the space and, hopefully, the expansive breadth of the human experience captured by poetry and literature, according to Hanson, who contributed her own lines to the feature.

“For me, what I’m super excited about is getting people who don’t normally encounter poetry in their daily lives,” she said as crews used molds to press letters into wet concrete. “I mean, we’re all super busy. We seek out the things that we already like or get introduced to. I like putting poetry in front of people where they already are — so, a park setting, I adore it!”

The 2.6-acre strip at 260 Brentwood St. used to be “nothing but grass and an old picnic bench,” Costa Mesa Arts Commissioner Charlene Ashendorf said ahead of an April 3 ribbon-cutting for the renovated site. The [space’s transformation](#) was made possible largely through a [grassroots campaign](#).

“They rallied their children, they rallied the community and they spoke before the council,” Ashendorf said. “They ... came to the Arts Commission as well, which I currently serve on, and said, ‘this is our dream.’ ”



Fences surround a new playground at Costa Mesa’s Brentwood Park, set to open to the public on Friday, April 3. (Eric Licas)

The community-led approach undertaken at Brentwood is an example of how the city hopes to collaborate with residents to create the facilities and services they need, Parks

Commission Chair Kelly Brown said, adding that the process got more people engaged in local government and built momentum for similar projects citywide.

“I felt like more people were either coming out to PACS, Parks and Community Services meetings or coming to the events as we were talking about what people wanted to see,” Brown said. “I think it’s also inspired other people in Costa Mesa to think about what they want for their parks.”

Resident input guided the redesign at Brentwood, whose playground equipment was three decades old. Features like a sloped landscape allowing parents to easily spot their children from a distance and ultra-soft play surfaces that prevent injuries are the result of community feedback.



Marco Reyes cleans a mold used to press poems into a concrete path leading to a new playground at Brentwood Park in Costa Mesa. (Eric Licas)

Now, large canopies provide ample shade from the sometimes-blistering sun and structures are painted in shades that blend with the surrounding green space.



Costa Mesa Poet Laureate Danielle Hanson at Brentwood Park, where poems by her, Lao Tzu and Federico Garcia Lorca can be found pressed into newly lain sidewalks.
(Eric Licas)

Bringing poetry into public spaces is the goal of Costa Mesa's Sidewalk Poetry Project, according to Laurette Garner, the city's arts specialist. For its next phase, officials will solicit verses from community members to feature at Shalimar and Ketchum-Libolt parks, also under renovation.

The project is one of several efforts Hanson has put forth during her first year as the city's [inaugural poet laureate](#).



Pedro Gonzalez, center right, and Filemon Muniz, left, press a mold of a poem into a path leading to the playground at Brentwood Park in Costa Mesa. (Eric Licas)

Others include Poetry-oke, which invites people to recite and share their favorite poems with a group, Poetry in the Park events that feature QR codes participants track down scavenger-hunt style and a variety of workshops.

Hanson, a lecturer at UC Irvine who says most of her students are science majors trying to fulfill general education credits, says she understands why poetry can seem unapproachable to many in the modern world.

“A lot of people come out of high school, and all you have is this decoding where you feel like you’re not smart enough for poetry,” Hanson said. “You were given a C on your analysis of a poem because you didn’t understand it ... because it was a language we don’t speak anymore; it was 300 years old.

“[But] there is so much wonderful variety in contemporary poetry, and so much of it is so accessible and just speaks how you speak with your friends. There’s beautiful stuff out there that I think most people don’t know is out there.”



Costa Mesa Poet Laureate Danielle Hanson, Arts Commissioner Charlene Ashendorf and Parks and Community Services Commission Chair Kelly Brown join community members in Brentwood Park Tuesday. (Eric Licas)