



Taking Pride in Norris Square

By Nic Esposito, Training Specialist

One of the great things about working for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation is that we all truly get to enjoy the final product that we deliver for the City of Philadelphia. Sure, a PWD worker may go home and be satisfied of a job well done when she drinks a glass of clean, safe water. Or a Streets Department worker may go home and take pride that his trash was picked up and his streets were clean. But at Parks & Rec, we actually get to take our families and join our friends at sites as varied as a playground, a wilderness trail, a recreation center or a neighborhood park. And that experience is made even better when you can appreciate that it's one of your coworkers who worked hard every day to provide that experience for you and your family.

I was reminded of this the other day while passing through [Norris Square](#) on my four-block neighborhood walk to drop my son off at daycare. Norris Square not only benefits from strong community development from the [Norris Square Neighborhood Project](#), but also lots of support from our Stewardship team as well as the continued dedication of the staff SMA Rafael Feliciano.

Rafael first came into our system through the recruitment of Stewardship Coordinator Julien Carrasquillo. After being asked by his boss Barbara McCabe to spearhead the formation of a new Park Friends Group for Norris Square, Julien knew to go to the former SMA, Rafael Feliciano, Sr. Mr. Feliciano was a beloved figure in Norris Square who was not only a dedicated public servant, but also lobbied for the donation of most of the tools available for grounds maintenance in the Norris Square tool shed.

Julien recalls, "When I finally got around to knocking on his door, he invited me in and we talked for a while about the park and our dreams for it. I cannot remember if Barb told me to mention it or not, but somehow we got to talking about the SMA position and how it was lacking at Norris Square. I asked him if he was interested, and he said no but his son would be perfect."

Mr. Feliciano's son Rafael Jr. had just returned from the West Coast and was looking for work. Julien asked Barb to bring him in for an interview after trusting this family source, and it was Rafael's confident demeanor and warm manner that sealed the deal. As Julien says, "He went into the interview, killed it, and got the job. After about a week, the park looked great and continues to look great to this day because of the above and beyond work he is doing."

Julien may be biased because he found Rafael, but he's also right. Just a few months ago, when taking my morning walk with my son, I entered Norris Square and immediately noticed that the benches, which were previously full of graffiti, now had a fresh coat of paint. A month after that, all of the basketball poles and pavilion poles, which were damaged in a storm, were freshly painted. Both times, Rafael secured the paint as a donation from a local hardware store. And just a month ago, I looked down to the ground and noticed something was different. Before I could place what it was, Rafael walked up and said, "Yep, I finally got around to the weeds in the cracks."



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Not many things make a park look worse than weeds growing through the cracks in the walkway. Rafael agreed and spent an afternoon scraping every square inch of walkway in the park with a flathead shovel to remove the weeds. Maybe I'm biased because I know the work that it takes to maintain a park. But I must say that I feel fortunate that my neighborhood has such a dedicated SMA who goes above and beyond what it means to keep a facility safe, clean and ready to use. I just hope he comes back next year.

