

## Preserve lakefront park for the residents

**Posted: Saturday, August 30, 2003 12:00 am**

Editor,

Although my wife and I have only recently moved to Benton Harbor, we've been active with the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen, Family Independence Agency and Samaritan Center for years. I make this statement in anticipation of the "you're not from here" criticism. I've heard this attack made on others who've commented on Benton Harbor affairs.

Long before we had any inclination to move, my kids and I used to go to the beach every evening. We'd go sledding on the dunes in the wintertime, too. That's how I developed an appreciation of Jean Klock Park. It's likely there'll be fewer and fewer people who can make this statement in the future.

We moved into property overlooking Jean Klock Park last year, and were told by our developer that the park belonged to Benton Harbor and was safe from development. As of this week, we no longer work with the law firm that represents the developer in the proposed project to develop Jean Klock Park, because we are now aware that this proposal has been in development for quite some time. We wish we had been advised.

Nevertheless, we have our joyous view of the beach, but we've also noticed fewer and fewer people in the park. While Silver Beach and Rocky Gap have no trouble attracting beach-goers, Benton Harbor charges \$2 to walk in Jean Klock. Accordingly, it follows (and has already been noted by our city council and the developer) that very few people actually use the park as things are now. This isn't surprising. And there will be still fewer people in the former park after sections of beachfront property are sold off.

What it comes down to is various of us already have a look at the beach, and the proposed action assures we'll only see a few more well-to-do people who look and sound like us there, too. A dozen or two dozen families or couples, many from Illinois, will be the only people you'll ever see at our end of Jean Klock Park: Private property - off limits. So much for the residents' park, for diversity, and for an unspoiled piece of coastal wetland.

By the way, if this doesn't sit well with you, get in the game and do something about it. Speak up, for Pete's sake, because your time is running out.

Kevin Gast

Benton Harbor