

Schmitz Park



Schmitz Park, ca. 1970 SPSA 270-23

The only virgin forest in any Western Washington city lies in a park above Alki in West Seattle. Former Seattle Parks Commissioner Ferdinand Schmitz and his wife Emma donated 38 acres to the city in 1908 and 1912. Another 7.5 acres were purchased by the city from the Alki Streetcar Line. The resulting site, named Schmitz Park, is considered to be one of the most beautiful natural parks in a U.S. urban area. In 1960, the Schmitz family also donated one acre of land to the existing school site. One of the Schmitz's sons, Dietrich, served on the Seattle School Board from 1928-61 and was its president eight times, making him the longest-serving board member.

In 1952, the district began to purchase property for the first Schmitz Park School, which was an all-portable facility that opened in 1953 to relieve crowding at Genesee Hill and Lafayette. More portables were added annually from 1954 to 1956, until there was an office, 10 classroom portables, a double-portable lunchroom, and a utility portable. Starting with K-3, the highest grade was retained until it became a K-6 facility in its fourth year of operation.

A permanent single-story building of fire-resistant materials and laminated beams was erected on the enlarged site in 1962. Enrollment the first year was 380.

Since the school opened, a highlight of the annual fall opening was the flag-raising ceremony, in which members of the Schmitz family regularly participated. Most notably, Alan Schmitz (1934-2012), Dietrich's son, attended the opening ceremony for over 30 years.

Details:

Name: **Schmitz Park School**

Location: 50th Avenue SW &
W Hinds Street

Building: Portables

Site: 3.5 acres

1953: Opened September 21 as
annex to Genesee Hill

1954: Officially named on April 16

1956: Became independent school

1960: Site increased to 7.51 acres

1962: Closed in June

Details:

Name: **Schmitz Park Elementary School**
Location: 5000 SW Spokane Street
Building: 12-room
Architect: Durham, Anderson & Freed
Site: 7.51 acres

1962: Opened in September
2016: School Closed; Students transferred to Genesee Hill
2016-21: Leased
2021-23: Interim site for West Seattle Elementary School
2023-[25]:
Interim site for Alki Elementary School



Schmitz Park, 1965 SPSA 270-24

Under the district's desegregation plan, Schmitz Park served as a K-3 facility from 1978-1989, forming a triad with Genesee Hill (K-3) and Beacon Hill (K, 4-6). In September 1979, parents voiced their disapproval of a district proposal that would have eliminated the regular school program at Schmitz Park. Instead, they suggested that Schmitz Park be enlarged and nearby Genesee Hill closed. Schmitz Park remained open and Genesee Hill was closed in 1989, and later reopened as an alternative school site.

Schmitz Park students received the President's Challenge Physical Fitness Award in 1998 and 1999, and their instructor, Barbara McEwan, was named state PE teacher of the year. Unique programs in bicycle safety and water safety were offered.

Throughout the school's history, the adjacent park has provided an outdoor classroom for nature studies, science, and conservation. The school's mascot, the Red Fox, was inspired by a real fox family that visited the playground each fall and spring and inhabited the nearby woods.

In the 2000s, enrollment surged from 321 students in 2008 to a peak of 643 students in 2015. In 2013, two double portable classrooms were relocated from Boren STEM to Schmitz Park to accommodate growth.

In 2016, Schmitz Park Elementary closed and a new replacement school at Genesee Hill, located less than a mile north at 5013 SW Dakota Street, became the new attendance area school for former Schmitz Park students.

After the school closed, it remained in the inventory of schools, though most of the portables were redeployed. From September 2016 to June 2021, the school was leased to the Associated Recreational Council (ARC), though the location was temporarily closed from April to September 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic measures. The YMCA also leased part of the building from September 2017 through June 2019.

In 2021, the Schmitz Park site reopened as an interim site for West Seattle Elementary School, while that school was under construction. Though the relocation was supposed to be for only a year, a concrete worker's strike caused delays in the project, so West Seattle Elementary School was not scheduled to reopen until Fall 2023. Alki Elementary School students are slated to relocate to Schmitz Park in fall 2023 while their school is under construction. To address capacity issues, a number of new portables were added.