Jack Russell Park Historical Background

Jack Russell Memorial Park is dedicated to James L. "Jack" Russell, who served as Chief of Police for the City of Atlantic Beach from 1931 until his untimely death in 1961. The official dedication of the park took place on August 4th, 1966 with a memorial plaque being placed near the newly created baseball field. Plans to turn this area into a city park and playground began in the 1950's as a result of increasing development in the area and the desire to acquire park land and a playground for children before the land was no longer available. Over the next two decades the city worked on acquiring the necessary land for the creation of both Jack Russell and Howell Parks.

In 1961, the City Commission was presented with a map showing tennis courts and a baseball diamond behind the existing fire station (current police/fire station). With agreement to move forward with these plans, the city looked at how to fill the swampy land in this area at the time and decided to use material from the nearby sanitary landfill. By the end of the decade, a baseball field, two tennis courts, a concession stand and an indoor playroom had been constructed at the new park. During the 1970's, a second baseball diamond and new tennis courts were added to the park as well. In 1978, a master plan for the park was completed that included the development of a municipal complex, a baseball/football combination field, basketball courts, racquetball courts, fitness trails, shuffleboard courts and paved parking areas. By 1987, the parking lot was paved and plans for the new city hall were underway.

In 1988, to set up a permanent tribute to the Bi-Centennial of the United States Constitution, the grassy median in the parking lot at Jack Russell Park was named the "Constitution Arbor." Trees were planted within this median by the Atlantic Beach Garden Circle, Girl Scout Troop No. 46, and Boy Scout Troop No. 37. Over the next ten years, the new city hall was completed, the parking lot was extended to access Seminole Road, a T-Ball field was developed, and three new tennis courts were added to the park. In 2001, in response to frequent skateboarding at Bull Park, the City Manager suggested installing a skate ramp at Jack Russell Park where the old restroom building was going to soon be torn down. Two years later, the Oceanside Rotary Club offered to raise $50,000 for the construction of the skate park if the city would agree to name it "Oceanside Rotary Skate Park", to which the city agreed. On June 28, 2014, roughly six months after the agreement, the Oceanside Rotary Club presented the city with a check for $60,000 from their fundraising events for the skate park. With additional contributions, including $35,000 from the City of Jacksonville, $5,000 from Sandy Forsyth, and $5,000 from Comcast, the new skate park was completed in early 2005. Tat Chan was the designer and used input from local skateboarders to include challenges for both beginning and advanced skillsets. Grindline was the construction firm and ended up building it larger than originally planned, at no additional cost, because they enjoyed the cause. The grand opening of the Oceanside Rotary Skateboard Park was held on May 14, 2005 and was attended by several hundred people.