

NABE'S PROTECTOR IS HONORED

BY JOYCE SHELBY DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Wednesday, July 21st 2004, 7:17AM

HE PATROLLED his block of East New York daily, carrying a walking cane and wearing a three-piece suit, along with his signature cowboy hat, tilted to one side.

In the middle of the night, if he heard gunshots, he was quick to investigate, with a boldness that left his family scared stiff.

"But he was not afraid," Nancy Walker said of her husband, George, who died in 1992 of heart disease.

Neighbors long considered George Walker Jr. the unofficial mayor of Wyona St., and yesterday the city got around to honoring him for caring so much for his block and his neighborhood.

The Verona Playground - bounded by Wyona, Vermont and Fulton Sts. and Jamaica Ave. - is now the George Walker Jr. Park.

"My father was not rich, nor did he wield great power over people," his daughter, Carolyn Walker-Diallo, 28, said during a ceremony late yesterday morning at the playground. "He was simply a man who felt that one should be entitled to live in his or her own neighborhood with peace and dignity.

"His bravery sent a message to those who would do harm in this community that someone in the neighborhood cared. Somebody was on watch and this community would not be overtaken. To him, the entire block was an extension of our home."

Walker, who was 67 when he died, was born in Jackson, Miss., and moved to Brooklyn in 1969. He worked as a machinist and with his wife, Nancy, raised four children.

Near their home on Wyona St. was Public School 76. Walker-Diallo said an older sister attended the school, but by the time she was growing up, the building had been abandoned and was a haven for illegal activity.

Community Board 5 district manager Walter Campbell said, "George would call my office every single day if he saw a stranger or if he saw someone do something illegal.

"I would often tell the staff, 'Tell him I'm on another line.' He would say, 'I'll wait.' Finally, I said, 'Mr. Walker, you need to join this board to see how things work.' He said, 'That's not a bad idea,' and he did," Campbell recalled yesterday.

Walker also was chairman of the Wyona St. Block Association, served on the 75th Precinct Community Council and the Veteran's Police Association, and was a supporter of the Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.

The playground named for him includes handball and basketball courts, swings, slides and shaded sitting areas. Brooklyn Parks Commissioner Julius Spiegel commended the Community Coalition to Restructure PS 76, which carried on the fight to get the abandoned school building torn down after Walker's death and later to get the playground named in his honor.

Spiegel said yesterday, "The spirit of George Walker will live on in this park."

jshelby@edit.nydailynews.com