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Walter Tarantino on the Jefferson lake bature in 1976.

STAFF FILE PHOTO

## Jeff park's creator dies in place he loved

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About 10 years ago Walter Tarantino began building a park on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Metairie.

Although it violated Jefferson Levee District regulations, Tarantino's sincerity touched the hearts of officials who allowed him to keep working there.

Using odds and ends found in the lake and along the Linear Park bicycle path, the elderly Tarantino created "Walter's Park," a favorite resting place for joggers and bicyclists.

Tarantino died of an apparent

heart attack Thursday while working in the park just east of the Bonnabel boat launch. He was 77.

"It was his labor of love, that's what it amounted to," said Frank Renaudin, Levee District vice president. "He used to walk along here with a wheelbarrow and pick everything up."

Renaudin said Levee District officials allowed Tarantino to begin his project because they were touched by his motives. "It was an exceptional case," he said.

The park is now an integral part of Linear Park and will be maintained, Renaudin said.

Tarantino, who lived near the

lake at the foot of Homestead Avenue, cleared away underbrush and spread shells between the lake and the levee. He used driftwood to build benches and landscape the area. Chunks of rock surround trees to form flowerbeds.

He spruced up the area every day.

Next to the clean, shady park, Tarantino used assorted pieces of wood to build a corral of sorts in which he carefully arranged the junk he found along the lakeshore. Sitting among plants and flowers in the corral are crab traps filled with beer cans, license plates, old beer kegs, shoes, swim

fins, and a plant growing from a bedpan.

A sign in the corral lists the park rules: "Don't be a litter bug. Please pick up your trash. Park closed at night."

"We had no idea the gentleman was going to continue (building the park) as long as he did," Renaudin said. "He turned it into a real nice resting place.

"He's been like a legend out here," Renaudin said. "He'll certainly be missed."

Tarantino's son, Walter Tarantino Jr., said his father lived along the lakeshore all his life.

"He died right where he wanted to be."