L.A. NOW

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA -- THIS JUST IN

Security cameras installed at Harvard Park after delays

January 24, 2013 | *3:28pm*
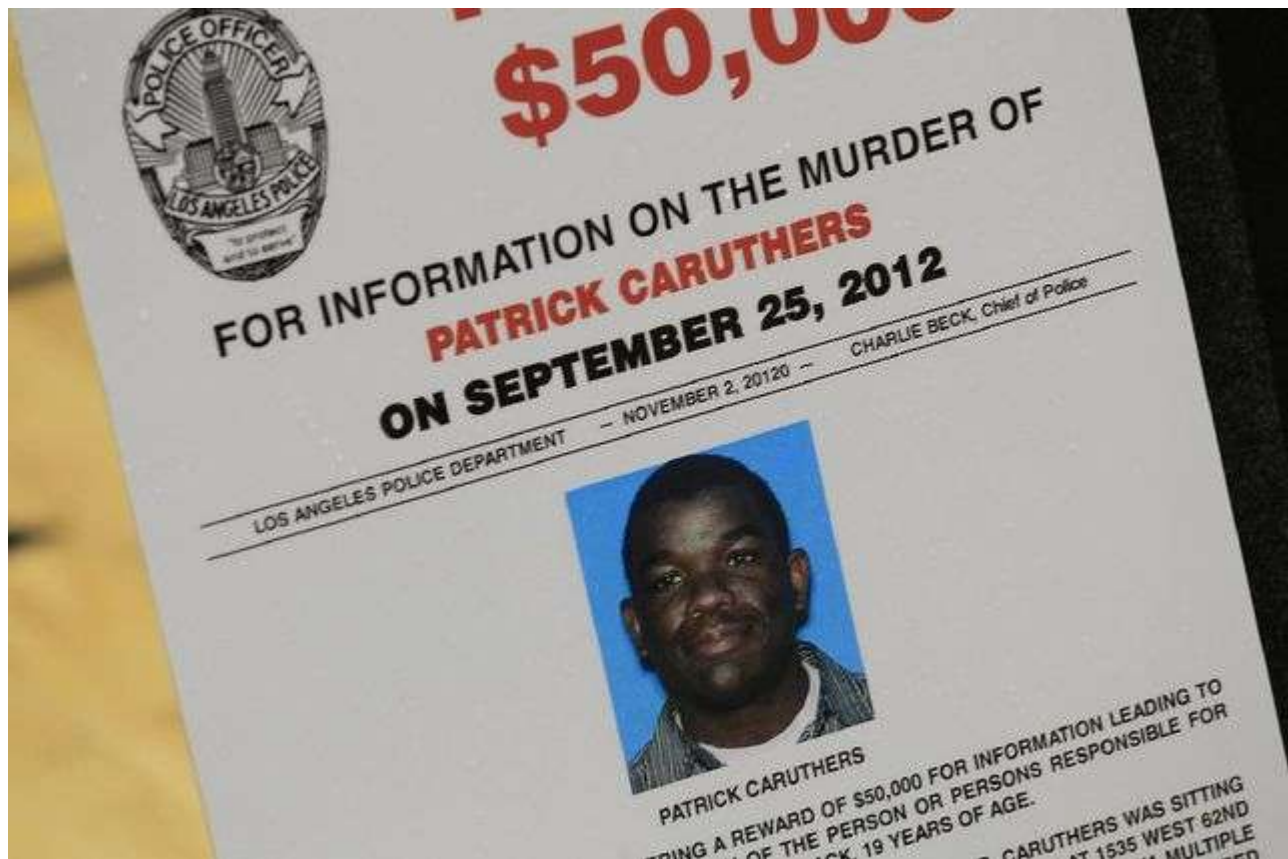
Los Angeles Councilman Bernard C. Parks unveiled six security cameras at Jackie Tatum Harvard Park on Thursday, an issue that stalled in the City Council for months until a youth volunteer was gunned down in the park.

The installation of the cameras marks the second phase of a multi-year project to revamp the South L.A. park, once a popular hangout for a Bloods street gang. Parks started pushing for cameras last year after he discovered reputed gang members were intimidating park workers, blocking residents from using the city-owned space and shooting music videos in the park after hours.

"We have had great success with each of our parks in remodeling them, in changing them and upgrading them," said Parks, who represent the area. "This is just one more phase to bringing this park up to standard."

The cameras, which are located in the center and perimeter of the park, offer a 360-degree view, and have the ability to pan, zoom in and record, said Officer Martin Martinez. They will be monitored at the Los Angeles Police Department 77th Division police station.

The city spent $200,000 for the cameras, Parks said. And another city official, Jon Mukri, the general manager of the Department of Recreation and Parks,noted that the cameras were needed to ensure the safety and protection of park visitors.

"This was born out of tragedy and let's not underestimate it," Mukri said. "Parks should be free of violence. Everybody should be able to come to the parks enjoy the outdoors ... but how sad it is that we have to do this?"

Surrounded by police officers, Parks said he hopes the cameras will deter illegal activities and prevent gang violence and tragedies like the shooting in September.

Patrick Caruthers, a fixture in the South L.A. park, was on a bench listening to music before starting his shift as a volunteer for the Summer Night Lights anti-gang program last September. A gunman walked up and shot him multiple times in the back. Police believe the 19-year-old college student was mistaken for a gang member.

No arrests have been made in Caruthers' death. A $50,000 reward has been offered to anybody who provides information in the arrest and prosecution of the gunman.

The reward signs were posted on a light pole, not far from where two of the newly installed cameras watch over visitors.

"I'm happy that the cameras are finally in place," said Caruthers' mother, Gail Sears. "My only remorse is that they were not in place prior to my son's murder."