

Fauquier Times-Democrat

Celebrating Now 250 Remarkable Years of Fauquier County History, 1759-2009

WARF Fun For All Playground dedication set for Sept. 18

Newly built facility provides access for all children

By DON DEL ROSSO
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

To hear John Schlenker tell it, the recession only slowed plans for playground set at the Warrenton Aquatic and Recreation Facility.

The volunteer playground committee, which he and Linda Reid of Warrenton co-chair, began fundraising for the \$300,000 project in the fall 2007.

In fewer than three years, it's collected \$210,000 in cash and \$40,000 to \$50,000 in in-kind donations.

Remarkable by most standards under most circumstances.

But "I thought we could do it in a shorter period of time," said Schlenker, who lives near New Baltimore and works as the chief financial officer for an electric trade association. "The economy made it much more challenging."

As it turns out, the Claude Moore Fun For All Playground will be dedicated at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 18.

The playground lies adjacent to the WARF

“
I tend to have a lot of faith in the people of this community. They've rallied behind it, as I thought they would.”

John Schlenker,
playground committee co-chairman

on Waterloo Road.

An "all-inclusive" playground, it provides access to people with disabilities.

For example, design features include a rubber surface, rather than wood chips or mulch, for

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FUN ON THE WAY: Tomas Hernandez, foreground, and Jose Alvidrez spread surface coating on the Fun For All Playground Saturday at the Warrenton Aquatic & Recreation Facility in Warrenton.

Photo by Alisa Booze Trostischel

PLAYGROUND

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children and others who depend on wheel chairs and walkers, as well as ramps, transfer stations, hand grips and railings.

Manufactured by Playworld Systems and assembled by All Recreation of Virginia, nothing like it exists in the area, Schlenker said.

Reid and Schlenker each has a teenage daughter with disabilities. Both are too old to use the playground.

The parents said it didn't matter that Katie Schlenker, 16, and Teylor Reid, 18, wouldn't benefit from the state-of-the-art set.

"It was just the right thing to do," said Reid, explaining her commitment to the project, which became something close to a part-time job. "There are a lot more Katies and Teylors in the world."

"I'm a big believer in inclusion," Schlenker said. "All children [with and without disabilities] benefit when all kids can come together to play, whether it's on the soccer field or a playground."

Reid and Schlenker conceived the idea for an "all-inclusive" playground during a TOPSoccer practice in the spring of 2007 at C.M. Bradley

Elementary School in Warrenton. (TOPSoccer serves children with disabilities.)

They talked some more about the idea and presented it to town officials.

"It was embraced and they said 'Let's go with it,'" said Reid, a 46-year-old housewife.

Reid and Schlenker formed an eight-person committee, which organized fundraisers (an annual which Easter egg hunt generates \$3,000 to \$4,000) applied to foundations for grants and sought cash and in-kind contributions from businesses.

The Claude Moor Foundation of Fairfax initially gave it \$50,000, Reid said.

Weissberg Corp., which owns three Warrenton shopping centers, donated \$20,000 and the Rotary Club of Warrenton and Dominion Virginia Power each contributed \$5,000, she said.

Warrenton gave \$12,240 for the playground set, according to town finance director Joan Jackson.

Working Together, a group comprised of county government workers, gave \$3,000, Reid said.

And local companies donated thousands of dollars in in-kind help.

Given the poor economy, "we're amazed that people continue to" give to the project, Reid said.

Never once did he doubt that the community and others would back the playground plan, Schlenker said.

"I tend to have a lot of faith in the people of this community," said the 48-year-old New Baltimore man. "They've rallied behind it, as I thought they would. We only have to call people and they pitch in. And it may not be money always but they find a way."

Apart from the town's donation and cost-free review, the playground will be built at no cost to taxpayers, Schlenker stressed.

The project shows how government, citizens and businesses can form partnerships for the "benefit" of all at minimum public expense, he said.

The town will own and maintain

BY THE
NUMBERS

\$210,000

Cash raised for the playground at the Warrenton Aquatic Recreation Facility

the playground.

Reid and Schlenker want to do more to enhance the playground experience, providing a shaded picnic area to include tables with removable benches for those in wheelchairs.