

Darrell's Dream Continues to Grow

Darrell's Dream grew a lot larger today with the Grand Opening of the Anderson Treehouse at the Boundless Playground. Sponsored by Past President of Kingsport Kiwanis, Sam Anderson Jr and his wife, DeLois, the Treehouse marks the completion of Phase III in the construction of one of the most unique playgrounds in the United States.

In 2002, Darrell Rice and Mary Steadman met to discuss an early vision of the playground. Later, children of all abilities in the Tri-Cities participated in "vision" meetings and told the playground committee what they wanted to see in "their" playground. One of the ideas was to be able to look down from the trees that rise behind the site. Soon after the vision meetings, Mary Steadman's handicapped sister, Dianna Presnell, was looking on the Internet and saw a web site for "Forever Young" Treehouses. This company constructed universally accessible treehouses for kids of all ages. Mary took the web pages to the playground committee and the dream grew.

Today, May 27th, 2010, at the Grand Opening ceremony, James Fyke, Commissioner of Environment and Conservation for the State of Tennessee, told the crowd that the Boundless Playground was one of the highlights of his 46 years of public service. Over \$1 million in state grants has been put into Darrell's Dream in combination with a unique partnership with local businesses and individual donors. Commissioner Fyke told the group that Warriors' Path State Park was the first state park in the country to build a Boundless Playground (assessable to children of "all" abilities).

Commissioner Susan Whitaker, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, spoke about the huge impact Darrell's Dream has had and will have on our area. It is already bringing kids by the bus load from three states as well as older handicapped people who want to "see" the Braille trail. Susan said the State recently published a brochure, the Sunny Side Trail, to promote tourism to the state. Warriors' Path is site #239 in the brochure with a mention of the Boundless Playground.

The Anderson Treehouse was designed by James Roth with Forever Young Treehouses, Inc, Warren, VT. James informed the audience that Kingsport had a second "first" with the playground and treehouse. This is the first Forever Young treehouse in a state park in the country! Assisted by J A Street, a local construction firm, the treehouse was specially designed for its current location and built with locally harvested oak, hickory and sawn pine. James said that no two treehouse that they build are the same. Each is unique. What they all share in common is universal accessibility. Ramps that can accommodate a wheel chair lead up to the treehouse. Our treehouse is mounted to three large trees on the front edge of the structure, using a unique mounting design that does not harm the trees and provides freedom for the trees to move.

To make the climb to the treehouse more interesting, Essyx Exhibits & Displays designed about six signs that tell a bit about the early history of our area as well as the birds, trees, reptiles and insects that make a home here. Each station has an interesting story to tell through pictures, interactive exhibits as well as Braille.

Phase III of Darrell's Dream will begin shortly with the construction of an amphitheater on the hillside just behind the services building. As part of their mission to serve handicapped children, the Palmer Center Foundation will provide a significant part of the funding for this expansion. Kiwanian Ross Kingdon serves on the Palmer Foundation Board.

Darrell's Dream lives on! Many, many thanks to the many Kiwanians who gave generously of their time and talent on April 23rd to ensure the playground equipment all looked shiny and clean for the Grand Opening today. On the "Day of Caring", over 175 volunteers worked over 1500 hours on many projects at the Park to prepare for a busy summer season.

As always, bring a child to Darrell's Dream and see it through their eyes!