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Boundless opportunities

New playground accessible to children with disabilities

By **LISA KNAPP** Staff writer

FEATURED ADVERTISER



EXPLORING: Jeremy Luhmann of Holland follows his 1-year-old daughter Jocelyn on the new Boundless Playground recently installed at Smallenburg Park prior to its dedication Thursday.

Sentinel/Dan Irving



Leticia Gallegos, 12, spins, from left, Antonio Alonso, 7, Junior Gallegos, 9, and Johnny Garcia, 7, on a ride at the new playground.

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Boundless Playgrounds founder addresses members of the Holland Rotary Club at the Holiday Inn during the dedication for Smallenburg Park's recently installed Boundless Playground Thursday.

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Don't be afraid to dream a little dream. If it's full of heart, it won't be long before a little dream becomes a full-sized vision, and maybe even a national movement.

Just ask Amy Jaffe Barzach, co-founder of Boundless Playgrounds, the first nonprofit organization dedicated to building playgrounds accessible to all kids.

Barzach's dream for one playground has grown to 100 playgrounds nationwide that are accessible to children of all abilities. Two of those facilities -- one indoor and one outdoor -- are in Holland. Barzach said she believes Holland is the first city in America with one of each.

The threat of rain on Thursday moved the dedication of the outdoor play equipment from Smallenburg Park, at 16th Street and Fairbanks Avenue, to the Holiday Inn and Convention Center, 24th Street and U.S. 31.

In August, the Life Services System Parent and Child Play Center, a fully accessible 15,000-square-foot play area, will open in the Life Services System building at the corner of 16th Street and Country Club Road in Holland. Both facilities were partially funded by challenge grants from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

At the dedication Thursday, Barzach shared the story of her son Jonathan, who died in 1995 at the age of 9 months. Challenged to find a way to memorialize their son, Barzach and her husband chose to build a playground.

When they realized the play structure they chose wouldn't be accessible to children with disabilities, they were inspired to build a structure where all children can play despite their abilities or disabilities.

With the help of a local Rotary Club, "Jonathan's Dream" opened in October 1996 in their Connecticut town.

Before long, other communities were calling to find out how to build their own version of accessible playgrounds. In these facilities, sand boxes are raised so children in wheelchairs can play, ramps take children with physical disabilities to the highest play decks, swings have high backs and arm rests and playground structures are configured so that all children can play at their highest level of ability. In 1997, Boundless Play was started.

The original Kellogg challenge grant of \$50,000 was received by West Ottawa's Woodside Elementary School. Principal Jon Manier was hoping to build the playground at the school, but fundraising for the matching grant fell short and the vision for who would benefit from the equipment grew. Manier worked with the Holland Rotary Club and the Kellogg Foundation to transfer the grant so the play equipment would benefit the entire community.

"We knew we couldn't let this drop. It started as a school grant but we could see it could better serve the community," Manier said.

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