The Geneva Community Lakefront Playground Project

June 2011 - October 2012

The Power of an Idea

Founded in 1995 by Darell Hammond, the KaBOOM! Foundation set out to correct the “play deficit” present in American society. This organization hopes to reinstate active play into the everyday lives of young Americans by working with communities across the country to build playstructures that are accessible and safe to the children in those communities.

Inspired by this model, Hobart and William Smith Colleges asked Darell Hammond to speak at the 2011 Convocation. His speech, entitled “The Power of an Idea” encouraged the incoming first years and faculty members alike to take action for the cause of play to make a difference in the Geneva community. With this idea in mind, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, along with key community members, endeavored to build a playground in the Geneva community.

Despite a few setbacks, and with many hours of hard work, we succeeded. As of October 25th, 2012, the Geneva Community Lakefront Playground is open to Geneva’s children as a safe, central playspace on the Seneca Lakefront.

Key Players & Community Partners

David Gage—Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Sage Gerling—Geneva Neighborhood Resource Center
Katie Flowers—HWS Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning
Ben Fraizer—Parkitects, Inc.
Jessica Lynn—William Smith ’14
Tara Rago—Lynn’s National Bank
Janelle Drach—The City of Geneva
Belinda Venuti—Geneva Community Projects
Jeremy Wattles—HWS Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning

Timeline

2011
November - City Council approved project
2012
December to January - Finalizing location
January to July - Fundraising
March - Design Workshop with community members of all ages
June - Volunteer recruiting begins, ordering equipment
July to August - Preparing site and volunteer recruiting finalized
October 20 - Community Build day

Design Day

As part of the KaBOOM! community build model, the Geneva Community Lakefront Playground Committee went to Geneva’s children directly to get their opinion on which equipment they would like to see in their new playground. This event, taking place in local Geneva schools such as West Street, North Street and St. Francis/St. Stephen’s, is called Design Day.

To engage their imagination, we asked the younger students to draw their “dream playground” on large construction paper. While most of the playgrounds from this exercise incorporated roller coasters, princess castles, and dragon fortresses, we tried our best to reflect this sense of large-scale play into our design for the playground.

For the older students, we got a little more technical. We gave students a “budget” of $100, reflecting our $100,000 budget, and pictures of actual play structures with price tags such as $3 for swings or $20 for large-scale climbers. Then, we asked the students to assemble their own dream playground, adhering to the given $100 budget. This way, we were able to reflect the exact wishes of the future playground users in our actual design.

Build Day and Official Opening

On October 20, 2012, all of the hard work of the past year came to fruition with the Geneva Community Lakefront Playground Build Day. 200+ volunteers from both the Geneva community and Hobart and William Smith Colleges came together to build the playground in its entirety. It was truly a sight to see.

From 8am-7pm, volunteers came in waves to build the playground from the ground up. From filling in mulch to building play structures to pouring concrete, inexperienced volunteers constructed the playground like old pros, with only a few issues (the Mobius Climber)!

After a four day waiting period, the playground was officially open to the public. On a beautiful October day, sponsors and organizers alike assembled to hear from speakers about the process of completing a project of such magnitude.

Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, and Geneva’s children stormed their new playspace. This image was iconic for the committee that worked so hard to see that this playground came into existence.

Fundraisers, Key Donors and Granting Institutions

Fundraisers:
The Relay for Play (November 2012), Cruisin’ Night Dunk Tank (July 2012), Fun Run for Play (June 2012), Farmer’s Market Raffle (Summer 2012), Echomen Concert (August 2012), Battle of the Bands Concert (February 2013)

Key Donors and Granting Institutions:
Wyckoff Family Foundation, Brenda and Dave Rickey and Daughters Foundation, Ontario County Public Works Department, Teresa Amott & Ray Miller, Janet & Stephen Wyckoff, Walt & Joan Gage, Ron & Barb Snyder, Inc.

Moving Forward

The structures assembled on October 25th were part of the PHASE I build for the Geneva Community Lakefront Playground. Led by Janelle Drach and the City of Geneva, PHASE II is well underway, and is scheduled to take place during the spring of 2013. This phase includes more structures that target the 2-5 age group, including a tire swing, bubble roller, omni spinner, and a climbing rock.

We will also install commemorative bricks engraved with names and messages from donors.