



Parental watch: Parents watched their kids from outside the picket fence.

Let's play

Rain doesn't dampen spirits at dedication

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Volunteers, city officials and others connected with the Kids World PlayScape said "sweat equity," generous donations and dedication were keys to the project's success.

Children waiting to use the brand-new play structure in Shiawassee Park ran through the entrance when the tape was officially cut, quickly taking up all the swings and slides.

Nearly 200 people attended Thursday's dedication and opening of the play structure. The rain didn't keep die-hard playground fans, like Alyssa Cravens, 4, from enjoying themselves.

"She was the first one on the swings," mom Susan Cravens of Farmington Hills said. Alyssa was trying to keep her Bonnie Baby toy dry with one hand while she swung. "We're going to be back tomorrow."

Christiana Palmer, 3, of Farmington Hills also was undaunted by the wet equipment. "Her favorite is the slide," dad Charles Palmer said.

Not all children were fans of playing in the rain, however.

"She went and played but got all wet (and came back)," Kim Moore said of her daughter Lindsay, 8.

Her brother Christopher, 4, was undaunted by the rain. He particularly enjoyed the miniature bulldozers that allow children to push and pull levers to move dirt around.

Laurie Esch, a Cub Scout leader, brought her group, Pack 45 to the park for its August meeting.

"They were practically tearing down the ribbon before it got taken down," Esch said of her troops, busily playing on the structure.

Thursday's dedication was attended by playscape volun-



teers, city officials from Farmington and Farmington Hills and local elected representatives.

At times, the dedication ceremony was emotional as people took time to thank all those who were involved.

"(The playscape) is the high water mark of my public service career," said Farmington Assistant Manager Bill Richards, who spearheaded the project.

"The playscape is a symbol of how much people in this community care about their children," said Frank Lauhoff, Farmington city manager.

Kids World PlayScape was brought to life in Farmington's Downtown Visioning Task Force meetings conducted in 1998. The city administration set the PlayScape budget goal of \$125,000 and Farmington City Council approved foundation funding of \$60,000 for the project.

The project's fund-raising committee succeeded in raising more than \$220,000 in dollars and in-kind materials, thus exceeding the project goal by more than \$100,000 and constructing the facility. Committee members Mardy Stirling, Bruce Lilley and Nancy Tashman tirelessly led the fund-raising effort.



Around they go: Michael Esch, Roger Mrozovich, Jordan Turner and Ben Behjati have a wild time in the rain on the tire swing.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL DARRIN

Fun times: At left, Billy Cova doesn't mind a ride down a wet slide. Above, Ashley Horne, Matthew Horne and David Carter fly the space shuttle.

County official says Hills road projects are on course

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Road construction is not as simple as plopping down asphalt and steamrolling it smooth, says a road commission planner.

Several months, if not years, of planning are involved as well as haggling over such things as right of way, said Theresa Gillis, programming supervisor for the Road Commission for Oakland County.

Gillis spoke at the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce Business Development Luncheon Thursday.

She gave updates on county road projects planned for Farmington Hills. Those include:

- Widening of 12 Mile to five lanes from Inkster to Northwestern Highway. Part of Inkster and 12 Mile intersection falls in Farmington Hills;

- Resurfacing Middlebelt from 12 Mile to Northwestern;

- Widening of Orchard Lake into a four-mile boulevard from 10 Mile to I-690, and;

- Adding a right turn lane on eastbound 12 Mile onto Orchard Lake Road.

All four projects are in various planning stages.

A chamber member whose business is on Orchard Lake and 12 and 1/2 Mile called the plan to add a right turn lane a "nice little project."

But, Target Equipment Leasing owner Linda Joliceur said another lane won't unclog traffic, which backs up in front of her business. Employees and visitors cannot get to and from the building, she said.

"It's a nightmare all day long," Joliceur said.

The business owner said the problem is the eight-mile stretch of I-696 where Orchard Lake is the only exit.

Joliceur is on a chamber task force looking into an additional 1-696 exit. The Michigan Department of Transportation, not the county road commission, handles highway exits, Gillis said.

"It's extremely difficult to get any exit funded by state dollars," Gillis added.

There is some encouraging news, Farmington Hills City Manager Steve Brock said. MDOT is at least looking at the possibility of an I-696 exit at Franklin and Tyler roads.

"Though it's not in our city, it will provide relief for the

Orchard Lake ramp," Brock said. Construction bids are expected to be awarded for the widening of 12 Mile from Inkster-Northwestern and resurfacing of Middlebelt from 12 Mile to Northwestern next month.

The Middlebelt resurfacing is an example of the commission's attempt to maintain existing roadways, Gillis said. Such rehab projects run \$60,000 a mile as opposed to total reconstruction that cost \$300,000 a mile.

"We not only have to look at widening and adding capacity, we have to look at preserving what we have," she said.

An environmental study needs to be done before the Orchard Lake boulevard project can be put out for bids, Gillis said. The county is also negotiating with homeowners for several small swaths of right of way along the west side of Orchard Lake.

Right of way acquisitions of eight to 10 small strips, and possibly a house, are expected to run \$250,000-\$500,000 while construction is estimated at \$9.6 million.

"That's not very much right of way," Gillis said.

Design for the project is 80 percent complete, Gillis said.

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