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CITIES & VILLAGES

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*Heritage Hill Playground
Green, Ohio*

Community-Built Heritage Hill Playground in Green, Ohio

Michael Elkins

"Together We Build, United We Play" was the battle cry of several hundred community volunteers in September of 2002. The community of Green, Ohio converged at Green's first public park, Boettler Recreation Park, to assemble one of the region's largest community-built playgrounds. The playground, labeled Heritage Hill Playground as a result of a local naming competition through Green Local Schools, is a massive 30,000 square foot play oasis which challenges the physical and intellectual limits of those who visit the site.

The community-built playground originated by a request from a local resident and a desire to utilize Boettler Park at a greater frequency. A committee of volunteers was put together by the city parks and recreation division to put together plans for the project. Local elementary school students provided input about the specific play structures.

Heritage Hill Playground, designed by Learning Structures Inc. from Strafford, New Hampshire, reflects the heritage of the City of Green, the state of Ohio, and the United States. It celebrates community, freedom and liberty. The character of Green as an early farming community is represented by the large barn and corn silo near the entrance to the playground. This custom-designed barn welcomes playground goers, complete with its own Bicentennial logo, painted by a talented local artist. The playground also has a replica river boat representing the regions long past use of the Ohio and Erie Canal.

Playground designers wanted to ensure the safety for all age groups. As a result, Heritage Hill Playground boasts a one of a kind play area designed exclusively for toddlers, yet integrated into the overall theme of the playground. The John



Glenn Tot Lot offers hours of play for children ages 2 to 5. The aerospace theme includes a replica of John Glenn's Friendship-7 Rocket, a Mission Control Tower, Communication Talk Tubes, a replica of John Glenn's Air Force Saber Jet and other imaginative designs.

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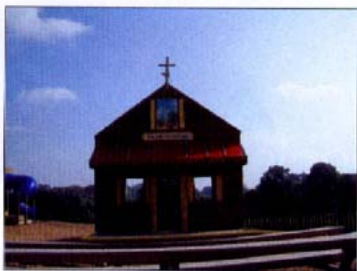
The physical and endurance ability of children are tested at the bicentennial challenge course. The challenge course consists of twin buckeye zip lines, zig zag beams, monkey rings and pull-up bars.

Not only was the city looking for an aesthetically beautiful playground that was state-of-the-art for safety and accessibility – but they also wanted to unite community members and build civic pride amongst volunteers. They succeeded as hundreds of community volunteers donated countless hours to build the massive structures. It was not uncommon to see volunteers working late into the night assembling the play structures.



Additionally, local contractors donated labor, material, equipment and much needed carpentry expertise. Green firefighters also gave of their time to the construction of the playground. According to Lt. Peter Deevers, their efforts were just a small way of giving back to the children of the community and honoring their fallen brothers in New York City following the events of September 11, 2001. The City of Green donated the use of its heavy equipment and equipment operators to assist in the setting of large beams and assembly of large play structures.

Playground committee members tackled the daunting task of feeding over two hundred volunteers on a daily basis throughout the building of the structure. Local food outlets and restaurants rose to the occasion by donating, or providing at



discount, three square meals per day for the volunteers.

The playground cost just over \$100,000 to build. Funds were raised by various means, including a community benefit spaghetti dinner, a reverse raffle, and a "Shop-in-Green Day" sponsored by the Green Chamber of Commerce. Green City Council pledged to match all money raised up to \$50,000.

The completion of the playground project culminated in an old fashioned ribbon cutting ceremony. Following the ceremony, hundreds of residents had their first opportunity to "play" on their new playground. The project created a lifetime of memories, created new friendships, and brought together a community, for the benefit of the entire community.

Michael Elkins is the Parks and Recreation Superintendent for the City of Green

