

PLAYGROUND FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OPENS IN IROQUOIS PARK

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“Play Together” Playground is Largest in Metro Parks System

Children with disabilities now have a large new playground in Iroquois Park that allows them to play alongside other children, thanks to a \$1.4 million project that was dedicated today. Funding for the “play together” playground came from public and private sources.

“We’re grateful to the DREAM Foundation and the Olmsted Parks Conservancy for their support of this project in Iroquois Park,” said Mayor Jerry Abramson. “This playground, which is now the largest in our Metro Parks, will allow all children to play together, regardless of their level of ability. We’re especially thankful of the Barnes family – Mitch, Meredith and Mitchell – for providing the vision and inspiration that ultimately led to this great new playground.”

In 1998, Mitch and Meredith Barnes’ son, Mitchell, was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, which is the most common form of MD, characterized by progressive muscle weakness and atrophy of muscle tissue. The Barnes family started the DREAM Foundation, which stands for Duchenne Research Education and Miracle, to raise funds and build awareness about the disease.

“The DREAM Foundation is committed to finding a cure for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and assisting families and children with disabilities,” said Mitch Barnes, the DREAM Foundation’s president and founder. “One of DREAM’s goals is to support these children through the design and creation of playgrounds with accessible equipment. DREAM’s ‘Play Together’ playground project creates play environments that enhance the quality of life for all children by enabling them to play together. We look forward to working with the Olmsted Parks Conservancy and Louisville Metro Parks in 2008 on a new playground in Shawnee Park.” A fund-raising campaign for the Shawnee playground will be underway this fall.



A child enjoys the new Iroquois Park playground, which includes spray features.

The playground includes:

- * An elaborate play area for children ages 5-12, connected by ramps and elevated decks.
- * A fenced “tot lot” designed for children ages 2-5.
- * Three swing sets, with a total of 10 standard belt seats and four molded bucket seats.
- * A 2,500-square-foot splash play area, with multiple water spray jets and misting devices.
- * 13,000 square feet of rubberized base surface to protect children while they’re playing.
- * Four shade structures to keep playground users cool.

A new 400-square-foot restroom building offers four separate fully-accessible units, each with a toilet and sink. A redesigned parking area includes additional space for handicapped parking.

While the playground's many features offer challenges for children regardless of ability, the design is intended to support users with disabilities, as well as those recovering from serious injuries. For example, a net bridge and stepping pads offer balance and physical dexterity challenges, which are key components of occupational and physical therapy. In the splash play area, the sounds of water will stimulate the senses of visually impaired children.

"We are proud to be part of bringing this playground concept to life in Iroquois Park," said Mimi Zinniel, President and CEO of the Olmsted Parks Conservancy. "It is another example of the Conservancy's continuing efforts to enhance Louisville's Olmsted parks." Iroquois Park is one of 18 parks designed by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his firm.

Funding for the playground project includes \$500,000 from the DREAM Foundation, \$350,000 from the Olmsted Parks Conservancy and \$575,000 from Louisville Metro Government. These three partners worked together to build a smaller accessible playground in Des Pres Park, off Taylorsville Road, in 2004.



During the playground dedication, speakers included, from left, DREAM Foundation President Mitch Barnes, his son Mitchell, and Mayor Jerry Abramson.