

The Cedar Hill Playground Rebuild

(as published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on May 31, 2011)

At 4:30 PM on Sunday, May 22, 2011, a celebration was held to dedicate the Cedar Hill Playground Rebuild, even though several hours work remained to actually complete the project. City Manager Mark Watson congratulated the volunteers on a job extremely well done.

The expansive and elaborate, yet simple and easy to traverse, playground replaced the original Cedar Hill Playground built by another group of volunteers in 1988. It had served the community well, but was ready for a makeover. And what an outstanding "makeover" this is.

The only thing remaining from the original playground is the historic and original dragon that was proudly displayed near the main entry way to the playground. The dragon was removed by Jon Hetrick, Oak Ridge Recreation and Parks Supervisor and Cedar Hill Playground Rebuild Project Manager, and set aside for installation in the new playground.

Overnight some two individuals saw the pieces of the dragon and, fearing it was being discarded, removed it to their home intending to refurbish it and return it to the playground when the rebuild was finished. This is what the note, signed by "bandit #1" and accompanying the dragon's return, indicated.

As Jon promised in the column on which he and I collaborated and published by The Oak Ridger, no questions have been asked, he is just proud to have the historic dragon returned. It will be placed in a prominent location on the new playground.

Mark had Jon bring the dragon out for the celebration and showed off the 'brand spanking' new paint job. What a grand and exciting time as the many volunteers cheered for the dragon's return and expressed their appreciation for it being placed on the new playground.

I have asked several individuals to give comments on this historic community volunteer effort. I think you will see a common theme, but each person gives their unique perspective to the project.

Josh Collins, Director, Recreation and Parks, said, "On May 18-23, the Oak Ridge community once again united its resources to build a playground at Cedar Hill Park. The effort was reminiscent of the original playground construction 23 years ago. In 1988, Leathers and Associates, an architecture firm from Ithaca, New York, met with elementary school children to design the ideal playground."

"At that time, over 1,200 volunteers responded to the call for help from the Cedar Hill Neighborhood Association. Under the direction of Bob Spore, the Association raised over \$40,000 to purchase supplies and materials to build the playground.

"In 2011, the City took the lead and once again called upon the community for help. Almost 1,300 volunteers stepped up to construct a new playground at the former school site. Without the support of the community, the rebuild would not have been possible.

Amy Fitzgerald, city staff said, "This is one of the most exciting and rewarding projects I've ever experienced—to see several generations come together and dedicate their time and talent to the new playground was just extraordinary. Kudos to all: Especially to Project Manager, Jon Hetrick, and the rest of the Recreation and Parks Department; the Steering Committee; and to all the sponsors who helped make the project a success!"

Theresa Scott, community volunteer and longtime Neighborhood Watch Program enthusiast, said, "Our Neighborhood Watch Program coined my phrase '**Get to Know Your Neighbor ~ Get to Know Your Neighborhood.**' I sent out many emails and made calls to people that I know to tell them to now '**Get Involved in Your Community.**'"

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"I told them: There's a playground being built!!! ...There's a maze, a climbing wall, slides, swings and even a castle and a ship!

"Over the past few days, there have been hundreds of people of ALL ages putting their thumbprints on this HUGE project! Children have been painting blocks for a mosaic or making the colorful chain. The teenagers have been showing off their muscle by taking loads of cement out to the 6x6 post bases to secure a GIANT ship or secure the new posts for the swing sets.

"The adults were sawing, drilling, hammering away to create steps to the third level lookout or rock climbing wall. When anyone checked in, they were given either a blue or red name tag. Blue is for the 'Unskilled' (someone who has never done any type of repair or construction) or a red one (the person who is experienced with construction measurements, cutting angles, using different saws and/or drills).

"The hundreds of tools have been donated for use by residents and members of our community. Nothing was broken.

"You probably can't believe that no one was arguing or fighting either. In fact, you heard so much laughter that at times, you wondered if anything is getting done out there! You turned off your tools and/or set them down because you had been called in for lunch. When you walked back to the site after a fresh hot meal, you saw that something new had gone up. The next time you looked up, there might have been another story added or perhaps the firemen had secured that pole (yes, there IS a REAL fire pole for the kids to slide down!!).

"For the past few days, from 8am to 8pm, I have been there. I don't have any children. I've never had a picnic at this park. However, I can now say that I've invested MY time and MY thumbprints are on this project. This is about the difference that I am making for my neighbors and their children of today, tomorrow and a hundred years from now. This place is going to be here for years and years - and years and years to come!!

"This project has allowed me to have fun with my friends and many, many people that I had never met. I've worked with a group of 'Unskilled' women who have graduated to being team of 'Skilled' workers and wear their red tags with pride! A couple had NEVER picked up a power tool and are now comfortable with and wanting to work a project so they can use the impact drill or miter saw!!

"My crew of three high school seniors was working towards making the future brighter.

Can't you tell that Theresa Holt is excited by being able to be a part of this historic volunteer project! She was so enthusiastic in her Facebook postings that I knew I wanted her insights included in this column. She sure did not disappoint! Thank you Theresa!

Mark Watson, being relatively new to our city, is obviously anxious to learn all he can about our unique history and it has been my pleasure to help him learn some of our history. He is a quick study and already knows much about our heritage. I am proud to know Mark and proud he is our City Manager. His participation on this Cedar Hill Playground Rebuild project is yet another indicator of his intense desire to see our city do things well and do things that have lasting value.

Mark said, "We (Oak Ridge) have taken the best of the Cedar Hill Playground ideas from our children and moved it into the future with an even bigger and better playground."

Mark worked right alongside other volunteers, sweating with the rest and seeking to make a difference through his personal efforts. He paid high compliments to the workers at a recent Rotary Club meeting where he "paid his fine" to the Red Apple to get to compliment volunteers on a job well done. He beams

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with pride when he talks about the project, maybe his first such effort as our City Manager. I hope we will see him in many more such roles in the future.

Another person who was instrumental in the Cedar Hill Playground Rebuild was Chuck Hope, owner of Chuck's Car Care Center, and volunteer extraordinaire. His efforts to coordinate the needed tools required to accomplish this historic feat was highly successful. Chuck reported that the number and variety of tools was remarkable. He indicated that the tools came from a large number of households.

Chuck told me about one lady who called and said she could not work on the playground, but that she wanted to do what she could. She indicated she was a widow and that her late husband had collected quite a large tool shed full of equipment. Chuck said to her that he would come by her home and see if there might be tools that could be useful.

When Chuck arrived, the lady took him to the rear of the house to an obviously well maintained tool shed and when he opened the door he saw a really well organized array of exactly the tools that would be the most helpful. Chuck thanked the lady profusely and loaded up the tools. This is but one example of the many people Chuck found who wanted to be a part of this project and who were anxious to loan tools to the effort.

Of course there were many other people who led this tremendous effort and who worked hard to make it succeed. I have not attempted to contact all of the key individuals, but wanted to give readers a flavor for the project by giving you a few personal perspectives.

My thanks to all who contributed their thoughts to this *Historically Speaking* article to help me recognize the volunteer efforts of a huge number of Oak Ridgers. The Cedar Hill Playground project was yet another example of Oak Ridge's unique volunteer spirit. What a great experience for nearly 1,300 people and what a great playground is now providing wholesome fun for kids and will continue to do so for many years to come.

Yes, we can be proud of yet another Oak Ridge volunteer project well done!

If you would like to see other photos I made at the playground rebuild, go to the following link:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/SmithDRay/CedarHillPlaygroundRebuild2011#>



The many volunteers at the celebration to dedicate the new playground

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The “Dragon” that was an integral part of the first Cedar Hill Playground and will adorn the new playground as well



City Manager, Mark Watson, paints the playground structure

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Pamela Wyatt, teenage artist, paints an image of a railroad tunnel AND herself