

FEATURED

FINALLY, A NEW PLACE TO PLAY

Community comes together to create park for children at Geneva apartment complex

By STEVE BUCHIERE sbuchiere@fltimes.com Sep 13, 2016



Steve Buchiere / Finger Lakes Times

Edgardo Caraballo swings at the new Playscape and Garden behind the Geneva Garden Apartments at 500 Pulteney St. Giving an extra push is family friend Samantha Quinones. The park was built by volunteers who wanted to provide play space for the children living at the apartment complex.

GENEVA — Edgardo Caraballo voiced his approval of a new park and garden tucked into the South Lake neighborhood with shrieks of joy. He flew high on a swing that was propelled by family friend Samantha Quinones.

"It's kind of cool," said Edgardo, a second-grader at West Street School.

It's the type of reaction volunteers who hatched and built the new playground and community garden wanted.



Edgardo's only suggestion: a trampoline.

"You can get them down at Walmart," he said.

Well, this playground is not going to have a trampoline, but there are plenty of other things to entertain children, some built out of materials on the site tucked behind Geneva Garden Apartments.

The park is called Playscape and Garden, the culmination of an all-volunteer effort led by Chris and Hazel Gunn of nearby Verplank Street. The Gunns, along with other neighbors, decided to create a park because there were none in the neighborhood near Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Chris Gunn said there are over 50 kids living in Geneva Gardens, and they pretty much had nowhere to play other than the parking lot. That didn't seem right to him and his wife, Hazel, who came up with the idea.

"There's still work (to do), but the basics are in place," Chris Gunn said. "It's 80 percent done."

He said more playground equipment will be installed. In the fall, they'll try to get some grass growing in the shaded park, which also features fenced-in areas for gardens that residents of Geneva Garden Apartments can use next spring.

However, Gunn said they're going to have to create raised gardens because the soil is not good enough for growing. The reason? The number of black walnut trees in the park, many of which were removed and re-used. Black walnut trees produce toxins in the soil that kill many plants.

The gardens feature 8-foot-high fences to keep the deer and — hopefully — other animals from eating the bounty, Gunn said.

Gunn said the park and garden effort got big support from HWS. The land was made available through a licensing agreement between Geneva Gardens and HWS, while the Colleges' staff and students made big contributions to the project.

Gunn specifically cited assistant professor Gabriella D'Angelo of the Colleges' Department of Art and Architecture. She provided a professional design for the park, which Gunn said would have cost them a lot amount of money had they hired someone.

"She was very instrumental," said Gunn, adding that HWS interns also made big contributions.

The project, started in 2015, included lots of land clearing and trash removal, he said.

"It was scrubby woods and, quite frankly, a junkyard," he said. "It just grew wild for 50 years."

The project would not have been possible without \$18,000 in grants from the Wyckoff Family Foundation of Geneva, Gunn said, as well as funds from the Neighborhood Action Program through the city's Neighborhood Resource Center.

And, when they did need professional assistance, the providers charged "nominal amounts," said Gunn, who said all work should be wrapped up this fall.

"Kids have been waiting and waiting for it," he said. garden tucked into the South Lake neighborhood with shrieks of joy. He flew high on a swing that was propelled by family friend Samantha Quinones.

"It's kind of cool," said Edgardo, a second-grader at West Street School.

It's the type of reaction volunteers who hatched and built the new playground and community garden wanted.

Edgardo's only suggestion: a trampoline.

"You can get them down at Walmart," he said.

Well, this playground is not going to have a trampoline, but there are plenty of other things to entertain children, some built out of materials on the site tucked behind Geneva Garden Apartments.

The park is called Playscape and Garden, the culmination of an all-volunteer effort led by Chris and Hazel Gunn of nearby Verplank Street. The Gunns, along with other neighbors, decided to create a park because there were none in the neighborhood near Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Chris Gunn said there are over 50 kids living in Geneva Gardens, and they pretty much had nowhere to play other than the parking lot. That didn't seem right to him and his wife, Hazel, who came up with the idea.

"There's still work (to do), but the basics are in place," Chris Gunn said. "It's 80 percent done."

He said more playground equipment will be installed. In the fall, they'll try to get some grass growing in the shaded park, which also features fenced-in areas for gardens that residents of Geneva Garden Apartments can use next spring.

However, Gunn said they're going to have to create raised gardens because the soil is not good enough for growing. The reason? The number of black walnut trees in the park, many of which were removed and re-used. Black walnut trees produce toxins in the soil that kill many plants.

The gardens feature 8-foot-high fences to keep the deer and — hopefully — other animals from eating the bounty, Gunn said.

Gunn said the park and garden effort got big support from HWS. The land was made available through a licensing agreement between Geneva Gardens and HWS, while the Colleges' staff and students made big contributions to the project.

Gunn specifically cited assistant professor Gabriella D'Angelo of the Colleges' Department of Art and Architecture. She provided a professional design for the park, which Gunn said would have cost them a lot amount of money had they hired someone.

"She was very instrumental," said Gunn, adding that HWS interns also made big contributions.

The project, started in 2015, included lots of land clearing and trash removal, he said.

"It was scrubby woods and, quite frankly, a junkyard," he said. "It just grew wild for 50 years."

The project would not have been possible without \$18,000 in grants from the Wyckoff Family Foundation of Geneva, Gunn said, as well as funds from the Neighborhood Action Program through the city's Neighborhood Resource Center.

And, when they did need professional assistance, the providers charged "nominal amounts," said Gunn, who said all work should be wrapped up this fall.

"Kids have been waiting and waiting for it," he said.