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## Playground to re-open with new equipment

By Lindsay Kriz

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ASH — Ruth Marlow dreamt of building a park in her community on Little Prong Road, but she died in 1991 before it was realized.



Staff photo by Lindsay Kriz

Work continues on a new playground at the Roosevelt & Ruth Marlow Memorial Park on Friday afternoon on Little Prong Road in Ash.

The late Bettie Marlow kept that dream alive by establishing the Roosevelt and Ruth Educational and Recreational Foundation in memory of her grandparents and then established Roosevelt and Ruth Memorial Park in 1997 on nearly four acres donated by the couple.

Today, Terri Godwin Hyman is continuing her great-grandmother's legacy and her mother's work by overseeing equipment updates for the beloved park's playground.

Hyman said much of the playground's equipment, which was donated by Union Elementary School in the 1990s, became outdated and had to be removed from the park.

This Saturday, July 15, the playground will officially reopen with brand new equipment thanks in part to a \$15,000 Let's Play Construction Grant from Dr. Pepper Snapple Group and the national nonprofit KaBOOM!

The grant is part of Let's Play, an initiative by Dr. Pepper Snapple Group to provide children and families with the tools, places and inspiration to make active play a daily priority, Hyman said in a

news release.

Hyman, who serves as president of the foundation, said she found out about KaBOOM! from a friend a couple of years ago and applied for the grant in September. After learning in December the foundation had received the grant, Hyman and other foundation members set out in January to raise the \$15,000 match required by the grant. Part of the funding raised by the foundation went toward material, including the playground border and mulch.

To raise the money, Hyman said, the foundation issued a challenge to all families living in the area and who've moved away from it to raise \$500 per family.

The foundation also received \$500 from the Brunswick County Community Foundation and donations from local officials, including state Rep. Frank Iler, who have supported the project.

"KaBOOM! is really great. They give you a tool kit on exactly what to do, how to mobilize and things you'll need throughout the process, including weekly webinars and talking to other grantees who've gone through the process," Hyman said.

As of July 7, the foundation still needed to raise \$3,000 for the effort and will continue to do so up until the park's grand opening Saturday, including the sale of a souvenir booklet for the project that will be printed in time for the event.

Saturday, when children regain access to the playground, they'll see the original but renovated hobby horses contributed by Union Elementary. They'll also be able to enjoy brand-new features like new swings, multiple slides, a crescent climber and a trapeze bar, said Carolynne Barrs of Morrisville.

Barrs works with Barrs Recreation, which provided the playground equipment for the foundation courtesy of BCI Burke Co. of Fond du Lac, Wis, the company also responsible for providing playground equipment at Mulberry Park in Shallotte.

Hyman said Barrs Recreation provided sketches for the foundation to let the children of the community have a voice in how they'll play at the park.

"We did have say in the design. We did what we called Design Day (in April), and the vendor gave us three mockups and we let the kids have an Easter egg hunt and combined it with Design Day," Hyman said. "And we let them pick their choice. Of course, they picked the largest one."

Barrs said what the children selected includes two different kinds of slides, interactive panels, monkey bars, two regular strap swings and a baby swing. The equipment is also ADA-compliant, meaning the playground is accessible to those with disabilities and will have some ground features for disabled children, including the crescent climber.

Hyman said she's ready for the children of the community to be able to enjoy the new equipment in less than a week.

"I think they'll enjoy having a park in the community (again)," she said. "The nearest park is about eight miles away if they don't have transportation, and this you can walk to literally (from) anywhere within the community."

Hyman said those who attend Saturday's ribbon cutting and playground reopening will have a chance to hear from Zephia Grissett, a former Union Elementary principal responsible for donating the original playground equipment, and from Brunswick County commissioner Mike Forte.

"I'm most excited, I'm just excited that the kids will have a new playground," Hyman said. "They can walk to it after church, they can come over and play. It's open to everybody. To anybody it's open."

In addition to creating a playground for the community, Hyman said her mother dreamt of building a community center where classes of all types could be taught to anyone. Hyman said no concrete has been poured, but plans for it are in the works.

"This (playground) is a big deal, but after that we want to — I want to — offer etiquette courses and STEM camps, things of that nature," she said. "The ultimate goal is to build the community center, and it would be right out here ... years ago (my mom) had an architect draw up a blueprint so we would have it, and we started out raising money for the building itself to be able to offer classes and courses."

Natasha Godwin of Cary, Hyman's sister, said it's awesome that this project has come together so flawlessly.

"It's a dream come true, definitely, and it's been a team effort, and I know my mom is excited in heaven because this is her dream come true," Godwin said.

Bettie's widower, Cary Godwin of Ash, said seeing the playground rebuilt was meant to be.

"This is a dream come true. It's a prophecy that my wife, my mother-in-law and grandmother- and grandfather-in-law, they envisioned this happening," he said. "'It's happening,' that's what they used to talk about during their last days on earth, was to have a place where children in particular in this community and in this particular part of town could come and would learn. That would be good for them."

Family friend and relative Maxine Jones of Ash said it's hard work that got the family and community where they are today with the re-opening of the playground and a community center in the works.

"When things were hard, (Bettie) didn't stop; she continued on," she said. "And I'm just happy for them today, and they're taking on their mother's legacy, what she wanted, and they're real hard workers; they won't quit."

The grand re-opening will be at 10 a.m. Saturday at 5200 Little Prong Road NW in Ash.

For more information or to contribute to the foundation, go to its website, [rooseveltandruthfoundation.org](http://rooseveltandruthfoundation.org).

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