

The Oregonian

Playground offers special fit for children with special needs

Disabilities - Gifts and volunteer help create structures that give campers full experiences

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The Oregonian

The sight of disabled children in wheelchairs, lined up along a playground at Camp Rivendale -- Washington County's only summer camp for children with disabilities -- distressed Susan Bender Phelps.

Many children who attend the eight-week camp, held at the Jenkins Estate in Aloha, could not use the play structure. "The playground went in more than 20 years ago, when nobody was manufacturing stuff for people with disabilities," says Phelps, development coordinator for the nonprofit Tualatin Hills Park Foundation.

"I decided right there that this could not happen for one more summer."

And it won't. When camp opens June 26, its special-needs campers will be able to play, swing and slide on a new, \$62,000 play structure built especially for them.

What's different about this play structure, Phelps explains, is its accessibility. Ramps take children in wheelchairs to most areas. A giant glider enables them to remain seated and still rock. Multiple tactile experiences, such as giant beads, allow for touching and feeling. An "intercom system" encourages cross-playground chatter.

"Not everyone can do everything on this playground," Phelps says. "But there's something for everybody."

To raise the money, Phelps sent a special mailing to families living on nearby Cooper Mountain who would benefit by being able to use the play structure when camp is not in session. She also solicited the 300 families whose children have attended Camp Rivendale.

By May, Phelps had her money and \$30,000 in free labor from the Oregon Recreation and Park Association. Jerry Burgess, a park improvement supervisor with the Tualatin Hills Park district, belongs to that organization. Several times annually, he says, members volunteer to help with park projects statewide.

"Eighteen guys from all over the state showed up to help install the playground at Camp Rivendale," Burgess says. "It took us a day and a half to get it done."

A ribbon cutting is planned for the first day of camp.

Phelps expects a few tears -- and a whole lot of playing.

"I can't wait to see the looks on the faces of those kids when they see the play structure," Phelps says. "How wonderful for them to have this wonderful structure."

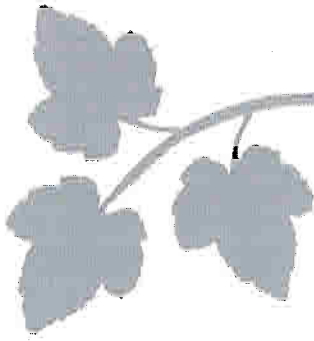
Phelps knows the daily struggles faced by the families who send their children, ages 6 to 21, to Camp Rivendale. Often, she says, it's the only respite parents have from caring for their special-needs children.

Phelps is focused on a new project, to raise \$45,000 for a rubber surface beneath the bright-colored play structure. Bark chips now cover the surface, providing a less than soft cushion for children who fall, she says.

"It's a playground, so you know kids are going to fall," she says. "My goal is to make the playground 100 percent accessible to everyone."

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Tualatin Hills PARK FOUNDATION

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NEWSLETTER

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Chairman's Message—Paul D. Waldram

Camp Rivendale Playground For Children of All Abilities Phase I To Be Installed In Time For This Summer



What an accomplishment!

Thanks to our wonderful volunteers and donors, Phase I of the new playground at

Camp Rivendale will be installed and ready for play on the first day of camp.

We are more than halfway to our goal. To date, we have raised just over \$63,000 in cash and another \$28,000 in-kind. Phase I includes the playground for 6 - 12 year-old children. We will use bark chips as a resilient surface for the summer.

We still need to raise another \$87,000 to complete Phase II of the project: a toddler play area and a

permanent resilient surface made from recycled tires that will cushion falls and make full accessibility for children of all abilities a reality. Your gift will help us complete the project this Fall.

Helping Hands Needed

On May 19 and 20, you can help with the playground installation. Join the professionals, members of the Oregon Recreation and Parks Association Maintenance and Construction Division, as they do the work.

We need volunteers to help assemble the equipment others to provide hospitality: meals and refreshments. To volunteer contact Susan Bender Phelps at sbphelps@thprd.org or call 503-629-6300 to volunteer.

**Hike 'n' Bike
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**Saturday, June 17th
7:30am - 1pm**

**Bigger and Better
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(See inside for details)