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Playgrounds for students by students

When more than 455 volunteers showed up recently to install a large new playground in Grand Prairie, Texas, the massive community project was the culmination of an idea that began when the Grand Prairie Parks and Recreation Department decided to turn to high school students for help in designing the new playground.

Freshman geography students at South Grand Prairie High worked with park planners and discussed options. Then on Saturday, April 4, they were able to finally see the end result of their hard work, as the community assembled to complete the installation in just five hours.

"This playground is unique because students were involved in the planning. They reviewed several different components and discussed the pros and cons of each activity. They also worked within a budget and voted on the activities they wanted most," said Tim Shinogle, Park Planning and Development Manager.



"It was a large project, but we got a huge response from our volunteers, who were well organized. It's incredible to do that much work in such a short time. Also, in order to complete a community install of this size, you have to have all of the parts there, and Burke made sure that everything was shipped complete and on time," said Jay Robertson, president of Child's Play, which represents BCI Burke and coordinated the purchase and installation.

Though students learned what goes on behind the scene during playground planning and installation, some lessons were more abstract.

"Students thought it was neat to be part of the planning and the build. It built their pride in the community and was a way for them to have ownership in the community. Some even look forward to taking their future kids back to say that they helped plan and build the playground," said Chris Cato, Marketing Communications Coordinator for the department.

Deadline looming for Burke's "How Green Are You?" contest

If you haven't entered BCI Burke's "How Green Are You" contest, you have until the end of April. All you have to do is send us an email telling us what you're doing to create a more sustainable world for our children.

The guidelines are posted at the BCI Burke site at www.bciburke.com/green. We look forward to hearing how you're making lifestyle changes to promote a healthier environment.

"As a manufacturer of playgrounds, we're in the business of serving children. And one of the best ways we can serve children is by doing everything we can to ensure a safe and sustainable world for future generations," said BCI Burke CEO Tim Ahern.



"We find that one idea sparks another, and together, we will find ways to better use resources and ensure a more sustainable world. This is one way to keep that conversation going in a positive direction and create more awareness," said Ahern.

BCI Burke, he noted, has made a substantial investment in sustainability in recent months with these and other initiatives:

- ISO 4001 certification, reflecting Burke's environmental system with specific policy commitments that include compliance with all environmental laws and regulations.
- Increased use of recycled materials, from the steel used in playgrounds to the recycled content for the catalogs used to educate customers about Burke products.
- Energy efficient lighting that has reduced total energy consumption by 16 percent.
- Use of renewable energy through the Alliant Energy Second Nature™ Program, under which we purchase enough energy from wind and other renewable resources to offset approximately 12 percent of our electrical usage.

Play it safe on playgrounds

April 20-24th was National Playground Safety Week, and with longer daylight hours and warming temperatures, kids are spending more time playing on playgrounds. We at BCI Burke view playground safety as a top concern, and that's why Burke is the only playground manufacturer to partner with the National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) to provide a free playground supervision safety kit with each play system purchased.

"In addition to providing the highest quality and safety play equipment, we also want to provide our customers with the best tools to ensure a safe play environment. The NPPS playground supervision safety kit is an outstanding tool, and we are proud of our partnership with NPPS," said Tim Ahern, chief executive officer of BCI Burke.

"Unfortunately, the lack of adult supervision is a major problem on playgrounds all across the country," said Ahern. "We ensure our products are safe. However, once they are put in the ground, we rely on adult supervision. We need adults to educate themselves and kids regarding safe play practices."

Some important tips to be aware of when on a playground:

- Observe any safety signs to know which playgrounds are most suitable for the age of each child. Play areas should be designated for preschoolers (ages 2-5) as well as school-age kids (ages 5-12).
- Make sure the site is free of litter and debris as these can be tripping hazards.
- Be on the lookout for broken parts, rust, sharp edges or any other evidence of disrepair.
- Play during the cooler part of the day to prevent kids from overheating.
- Always supervise children at play. Many injuries occur on playgrounds because children are not being properly monitored.

More than ever, our world needs smiles

By Tim Ahern

The more miserable things are in the world around us, the more we need things that make us smile. For the last few months, I've taken some small comfort in knowing that BCI Burke is in the business of making kids (and their parents) smile. I still have memories from my days as a child, going to the park or enjoying time with friends on the school playground. We smiled a lot, and some of us forged relationships that make us smile to this day.

For the past few months, I've seen far too few smiles. We've had a steady diet of bad economic news -- people losing jobs and homes, businesses folding, and people struggling just to survive. There's an old proverb that says "It's always darkest before the dawn." It's been around so long, nobody even seems to know who said it first, but it doesn't matter. I think it's true.

Few things are more beautiful than a sunrise, and there seems to be a faint glow on the eastern horizon.

As I write this column, the news continues to be gloomy, but the stock market has risen more than 25 percent from its low in early March. Consumer confidence numbers have increased ever so slightly. A survey of institutional money managers found that nearly half are willing to take more risk than they were just three months ago.

Most importantly, my sense of things is that people are looking for a reason to smile again. That's the only way I can explain



the phenomenal turnout of more than 455 volunteers to install a new BCI Burke playground in Grand Prairie, Texas (see lead story in this issue). Our personnel -- some of whom flew in from our Wisconsin headquarters -- were overwhelmed at the sight of a very large playground being installed in just a few hours.

And now, children are playing there every day. I like to think there are a lot of smiles around.

While no one knows when we will reach the end of this downturn, I know with a certainty that we are closer than we were. Every day brings us a little closer to the sunrise, and my guess is that when we finally get there, it'll be one to remember.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to go about our business of creating playgrounds that bring smiles, never passing up an opportunity to offer an encouraging word.

If we spread more smiles now, maybe it'll be easier to bide our time until there's more to smile about. Hopefully sooner than we think.

Burke quality and service attract new reps

Custom Playgrounds was established last July as a company that installed playgrounds, but didn't sell them. But after installing a BCI Burke playground, and seeing Burke's quality and services up close, the company soon decided to start selling Burke playgrounds as well.



"When we first started our business, our focus was on installations. Then we learned about BCI Burke, and saw where the playgrounds are manufactured. When Burke asked us to become reps, we decided to embrace the opportunity," said Mary Beth Kling, sales representative for Custom Playgrounds, which sells Burke playgrounds in Northwest Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Dennis Puett, CEO of US Playstructures, on the other hand, had wanted to be a Burke representative and was thrilled when his company was offered the chance.



"I knew that I wanted to work with Burke. I've installed playgrounds for more than 20 years, have six NPSI certified playground safety inspectors on staff, and I've wanted to sell top-of-the-line products, like Burke offers, for some time now. I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity. This isn't their first rodeo as you can tell by the quality and service they offer. They are the Cadillac of our industry," said Puett who represents Burke products in Georgia and Alabama.

Puett said he is proud to represent Burke because of the company's emphasis on quality.

"Burke offers superior products. From the connection systems to the powder coatings and decks, everything they do enhances the overall quality of the play structure. If you compare a Burke playground side-by-side with another playground, there's no question which one is superior," said Puett.

But though the quality attracted Puett, Kling says it's the support and service that attracted her to Burke.

"Burke works for their reps and customers. They provide the information, software and follow-up service to ensure a smooth experience. And if something does go wrong, Burke wants to know about it so they can learn from it and improve," said Kling.