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M'town Elks dedicated handicap swing
 MELISSA L. GAFFNEY, Staff Writer, The Courier, June 5
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All children of Middletown had something special to swing for joy about on Saturday, May 31.

The Middletown Elks Lodge No. 2179, of Belford, dedicated a wheelchair swing at Croydon Hall, Leonardville Road.

Mike Dickie of the Elks said Pat Dunphy, a doctor of physical therapy, and World Construction Company, Port Monmouth, both contributed to the project.

Dickie said it was Dunphy's idea and that she donated the frame from which the swing hangs. He said World Construction donated its time and labor.

The Elks purchased the swing itself. Dickie said the project cost about \$2,500 for the swing and apparatus.

He said the project began during March. "The Elks wanted the children to have the swing for the summer," Dickie said. "[The Elks] wants the kids to be kids and get dirty."

Dickie said the swing is unique because it might be the only one of its kind in Monmouth County. "The only other [wheelchair swing] I know of is in Milltown," he said. "[These swings] are very rare."

He said the Elks found out about the swing through Dunphy and thought it would be a

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great idea.

Dickie said the ramp is hung over a rubber ground that looks just like the woodchips surrounding the swing. "The back [of the swing] comes down," he explained. "There is a ramp and two chains to keep [the swinger] confined."

Dickie said the community worked together and coordinated with the township. He said the department of public works picked out the spot and has said it will maintain it.

"[The Elks] want the kids to be kids," Dickie said. "We want to treat them the same, as if they don't have a disability."

Members of the Elks Lodge, the public works and several families turned out for the swing dedication.

Also at the dedication were Todd Syrdal, Elks Chairman of the Special Children Committee (SCC); Ed Lopez, of World Construction; Exalted Ruler Mike Parulis; Mayor Gerard Scharfenberger; Deputy Mayor Pamela Brightbill; and Committeeman Patrick Short.

Families ready to try out the swing included Jim and Martha Smith with their son, Kyle, 8; Nancy Pavelka-Luebs and her daughter, Melanie Luebs, 10; and sisters Abby, 7, and Sabrina Dunn, 10.

"The installation of the handicap swing is the perfect example of a community need being identified and a collaboration of the township and community organizations working together to meet it," Brightbill said. "Middletown is thrilled to have been able to find a spot in [its] playground at Croydon Hall for this amazing swing."

Brightbill said the parents she spoke with loved the location because it is in an already existing park. "[Parents'] wheelchair-bound kids can play at the same time their siblings can," she said.

The deputy mayor said it was thrilling to see three of Middletown's special residents take the first rides on the swing.

Short said the township has to give thanks to the Elks. "They do so much for Middletown," he said. Brightbill also said Dickie works "tirelessly" helping handicapped kids in the community.

Short said Saturday was a very special day. "If you would have seen the faces and smiles that they were showing," he said. "And [they were] having fun just like other children. That made the day."

The committeeman said the dedication went very well and that he was impressed with the construction. "[The ground below the swing] looked like regular mulch," Short said. "It's recycled rubber and is very protective."

Short said he thought the wheelchair swing was a "win-win" all the way around.

"The Elks are the best-kept secret in Middletown," Dickie concluded.

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