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M'town Elks, hockey star supported PTA

MELISSA L. GAFFNEY, Staff Writer, The Courier, May 22
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Over 300 Middletown residents showed their support of the Port Monmouth Parent Teacher Association (PTA) on Friday, May 16.

The PTA's Playground Committee hosted a spaghetti dinner with special guest Ken Daneyko, a former New Jersey Devil.

The event raised money for the committee's playground fund, something co-chair Marie Boccasino said was needed at Port Monmouth Elementary School. "The school has a playground currently, but it's very old," she explained. "The Board of Education doesn't have any funding for a new one."

Boccasino said the playground will cost anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000, but that the committee has already raised about half of its goal of \$70,000. "Many people from town went to Port Monmouth Elementary," she said. "[The PTA] wanted to help the children and enhance school spirit."

The Port Monmouth Elementary School consists of about 240 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Boccasino said the new playground would be designed for children ages 5 to 12, and the committee is still deciding on what concepts to include. "It won't be too tall," she said. "We will also be adding swings."

Joining his wife in chairing the committee, Dennis Boccasino said Girtain Signs, Toms River, donated a sign for keeping track of the fundraiser's progress that will be displayed

(multiple images), Click to Zoom



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outside the school.

Both said, were it not for the Middletown Elks Lodge No. 2179, Belford, they did not know what the committee would have done. The Boccasinos said it was truly a blessing that the Elks approached the PTA, on their own behalf, and volunteered the organization's space, time and support. "They did this completely for us," Marie said.

Dennis Boccasino reflected on the Middletown community and recognized the caring residents in their own backyard. "There are people [in Middletown] who do so much," he said.

PTA President Jennine Kelly said the Elks literally went "above and beyond" for Port Monmouth.

Exalter Ruler Mike Parulis said the Elks wanted to help and become more involved in the community. More importantly, Parulis said the organization wanted to help the kids. "[The Elks] donated its building and the food," he said. "We cooked dinner for about 600."

Parulis also said the Elks would donate \$5,000 toward the playground fund. "We are trying to get [the PTA] more money through the state Elks [organization]," he added.

The principal of Port Monmouth Elementary School, Dean Bisgrove, said the Port Monmouth community is a true family. "The fact that [the PTA] is reaching out is touching," he said. "We pour everything into the education of our children. When [the PTA] reciprocates with events like this, it's really something."

Marie Boccasino said the PTA was fortunate that Elks members knew Daneyko. "They were wonderful enough to offer, and we figured the playground and a hockey player come together in sports," she said.

Daneyko, originally from Canada, said he has lived in New Jersey since 1982, a year before he began playing for the Devils. "The states have been so good to me," Daneyko said.

Now a broadcaster and analyst for MSG Plus, Daneyko said he is blessed enough to have done "a lot of nice things" during his career, and can still continue doing so. "When I come to smaller towns like this, I see just how it does make a difference," he said.

If any resident would like to donate to the playground fund, they can send donations to: Port Monmouth Elementary School, c/o The Playground Fund, 202 Main St., Port Monmouth, N.J., 07758.

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