

Real Estate	Mortgage	Automotive	Employment	Services	Classifieds	Market Place	Media Kit
-------------	----------	------------	------------	----------	-------------	--------------	-----------

News
HOME
Front Page
Bulletin Board
Letters
Editorials
Obituaries
Sports
Video Index



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New swing lets kids be kids

BY JAMIE ROMM Staff Writer



Kyle Smith (l-r), Melanie Luebs and Abby and Sabrina Dunn are among the first children to enjoy the new swing that is accessible to children in wheelchairs.

MIDDLETOWN - A new piece of playground equipment will allow specialneeds children to enjoy the playground at Croydon Hall along with their siblings and friends.

A new wheelchair swing has been added to the playground thanks to a community partnership forged between Middletown Elks Lodge 2179, Whirl Construction, local physical therapist Dr. Pat Dunphy, and Middletown Township.

The dedication ceremony for the swing was held May 31 at the playground on Leonardville Road.

"The installation of the handicap swing is a perfect example of a community need being identified and a collaboration of the township and community organizations working together to meet it. Mike Dickie, from the Middletown Elks, who works tirelessly helping handicapped kids in the community, Pat Dunphy, a Middletown physical therapist, and Whirl Construction purchased

and installed the swing," Deputy Mayor Pamela M. Brightbill said in a press release. "Middletown is thrilled to have been able to find a spot in our playground at Croydon Hall for this amazing swing,"

Brightbill attended the dedication ceremony along with Mayor Gerard Scharfenberger and Committeeman Patrick Short.

Dickie said that it was Dunphy who came to the Elks in March with the idea for the swing.

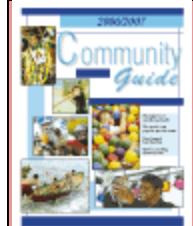
"When we heard the idea, we thought that it would be great," Dickie said. "We all came together to make this possible. It's something we can be proud of."

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



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Featured
Special Section



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Archive
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The swing allows special-needs children who use wheelchairs to enjoy the park's swings, Dickie explained.

To use the swing, the wheelchair is rolled onto a special platform that closes to allow the child to move freely as a regular swing.

As his final project as Handicapped Committee chairman of the Elks, Dickie oversaw the construction of the swing. He is relinquishing the position to become chairman of the district Handicapped Committee.

Abby Dun, Melanie Luebs and 2007 Elks poster child Kyle Smith were among the first children to take rides on the new swing.

"It was thrilling to see firsthand three of our special residents take the first rides on the swing," Brightbill said after the ceremony. "The parents I spoke with love the location because it is included in an already-existing park. Their wheelchair bound kids can play at the same place their siblings can."

Dickie said the ramp and swing platform are suspended over a rubber base that looks just like the woodchips surrounding the swing, and the back comes down.


Croydon Hall's playground is located across from the Parks and Recreation Administration Building at 900 Leonardville Road, Leonardo.

The swing is one of only a handful known to exist in Monmouth County.

Dickie said that Whirl Construction has already built a swing in Milltown as well. With the summer months ahead, Dickie said that the swing should be a hot commodity for fun.

"We just want the kids to be kids," Dickie said. "Kids are supposed to have fun - it shouldn't matter if they're handicapped or not."


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