

Hannah's Hope playground could break ground this fall in Portage

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Provided

A rendering of the proposed Hannah's Hope all-inclusive playground at Founders Square Park in Portage.



All-inclusive playground planned for Portage's Founders Square

PORTRAGE — Imagine a place where a disabled youngster can play, equally, alongside her able-bodied siblings.

They can share a swing or interact on the same level of an elevated platform; a place, say organizers, where all children are treated the same.

That place will be Hannah's Hope Playground at Founders Square Park.

"We believe we are ready to get this rolling," said Niki Avina, of Highland, a member of the playground committee of Hannah's

Hope, a nonprofit founded by Mary and Mike Martinez of Valparaiso and named after their daughter.

Hannah was born in 2009 with severe special needs, likely due to a prenatal stroke. Before she died in 2012, the Martinezes formed Hannah's Hope, a nonprofit organization which raises funds to assist other families with special needs children.

While they have provided equipment and funding for treatment and medication, they wanted to

build something more tangible to honor their daughter and began fundraising to build an all-inclusive playground. Working with the city of Portage, it was decided the 17,500-square-foot playground would be located at Founders Square Park.

The design for the playground was unveiled last week during a gala fundraiser.

It will be one of two demonstration playgrounds of its type in the country, Avina said. The other is in Utah.

The group chose Sinclair Recreation of Holland, Michigan, to provide the equipment from Game Time Equipment of Fort Payne, Alabama.

The cost of the playground will be about \$300,000 for the equipment; about \$250,000 for the surface and \$15,000 for installation supervision.

Portage Parks Superintendent Jenny Orsburn said they are applying for a matching grant from Game Time Equipment which could pay for half the cost of the equipment. It has also been designated a community build project in which volunteers, under the supervision of Sinclair Recreation, will construct the playground. Local unions have already stepped forward to volunteer their time to construct the playground.

Orsburn said they should know the fate of the grant by August, then be able to order the equipment and set an installation date. The city has committed to complete the site work and maintain the playground. Holladay Properties, which is constructing a residential/retail development adjacent to the park, donated \$50,000 in impact fees for its construction and has pledged \$2,500 a year for 20 years for its maintenance.

"We were told to dream big at Hannah's Hope and we did. We have fund raised for five years," said Avina, adding the May 6 gala fundraiser was successful beyond the group's dreams.

An auction held at the event, said Orsburn, raised enough funding for one piece of equipment alone, an accessible teeter-totter.

"We were blown away by the generosity of the community," she said.

The park will be one of a kind, said both Orsburn and Avina.

There will be eight types of swings alone, said Avina. One will allow disabled and abled children to swing together. A monkey bar-type apparatus will allow a child in a wheelchair to pull himself through without assistance. Ramps, she added, won't dead end. They will lead to an activity.

The playground is also designed to provide therapeutic services for children in which they can exercise with their therapist, parent or other caregiver.