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## Possibility Playground project gains momentum

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Possibility Playground is coming closer to reality, with organizers raising more than \$80,000 of the estimated \$450,000 cost in just a few months and receiving support for individuals and companies near and far.

The effort to build a playground accessible to children of all abilities in Port Washington's Upper Lake Park received a significant boost recently when Shirli Flack and her company, Allied Insulation, each agreed to donate \$25,000.

"We really needed someone to step forward and be the first to do something like this," general coordinator Mardy McGarry said. "Shirli's such a generous lady."

Flack said the idea of Possibility Playground appealed to her from the start.

"I think it's a really good idea," she said. "It's for the children, and that's important to me."

"I was fortunate enough to have healthy children and healthy grandchildren. Some of my grandchildren went to day care with children with Down's syndrome and they learned a lot about life. I think it's good exposure for children to play together."

Flack said she hopes that having her company match her donation will prompt other businesses to do the same.

"We can set the stage for this to happen," she said.

Molded Dimensions of Port Washington has also taken up the challenge, agreeing to purchase a component in the playground for between \$3,000 and \$5,000 and also supporting its employees if they volunteer to help build the play area next September.

"People are already expressing interest," Molded Dimensions Chief Operating Officer Linda Katz said. "We're a manufacturing facility. We like to build things, and this is a very tangible thing we can

work on that will have a real benefit to the community."

The company is considering a variety of incentives to its 75 employees if they volunteer for a four-hour shift building the playground, including payment of the \$50 fee or perhaps vacation time, Katz said.

Playground organizers have said they need 500 people to volunteer to help build the structure between Sept. 17 and 21, 2008.

Katz said she was impressed by the presentation made by the Possibility Playground and the impact the structure can have on the community.

"When you think about a half-million-dollar project, what we're doing is probably less than 1% of it," she said. "But it will have a great impact on Port Washington."

"A number of the employees and I felt this is a really inspiring and neat project. Accessible playground are fun for everyone. They feel good because lots of people can enjoy them."

McGarry noted that a final design for the playground incorporates more local landmarks and learning components than the original plan. The organization is also talking with Milwaukee School of Engineering and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design to get their students involved in the project.

"It's coming together and it's beautiful," McGarry said.

That includes the daunting challenge of fund raising, she said.

"We have gotten a tremendous community response. We're right on track," said Stacey Peters, fund-raising chairman for the playground. "I think there are a lot of people who can identify with what we're trying to do, and there are a lot of people who are emotionally tied to the project." The group has already raised almost 20% of its goal and is now branching out to seek grants and corporate contributions, she said.

"We've already applied for five grants," Peters said, adding the group hopes to raise about \$100,000 in grant money and the rest through corporate and individual contributions and the sale of more than 40 playground components as well as pickets and bricks. "We still have almost a year to raise this amount."

A significant part of the grant writing was realized recently when Possibility Playground of Ozaukee County obtained tax-exempt status, McGarry said.

"That makes all the difference in the world," she said. "There were grants we couldn't apply for because we didn't have it."

It also makes a difference to donors who want a tax deduction for their contributions.

While corporate contributions are beginning to roll in, McGarry noted that a significant amount of funding has been raised through a "grassroots" campaign. It has included not only such events as a carnival and hair-styling station at Port Washington's Maritime Heritage Festival and the sale of items such as T-shirts, book bags and an upcoming cookbook, but also change collected in castles set out at area stores.

"When you're talking \$450,000, it doesn't sound like a lot, but it's amazing when you think of how much you can raise that way," she said. "It really does add up."

The group has had a booth at the Port Washington Farmers Market that has raised awareness and collected donations. "We have some regulars who stop by and check on us every week," McGarry said.

She is gratified at the response to the project, McGarry added.

"It wasn't that long ago we started this, and we've come so far," she said. "In a year, we'll be done building it."

"I've been meeting so many neat people. I can't wait for them to experience the playground. It's going to grow right out of the ground. It's going to be so neat."

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