

Moms Rally a Community to Improve a Park

By Danielle Haugh

For parents, a playground is more than swings and slides. It is a place where children laugh, enjoy the outdoors, make friends, and most importantly, be a kid.

A local group of mothers saw great potential in Greentree Park, an under-utilized community park in Willistown Township, near the town centers of Malvern and Paoli. In 2010, when the MOMs Club of Malvern asked the township for help, Willistown was not able to fund new equipment for the park. For some in the group, this was not a response they could live with. They saw the bones of an amazing park in their own backyards and decided to roll up their sleeves and make it happen. Thus the community group "Friends of Greentree Park" was formed.

"The township does not have a complete playground with parking, green space, fences, bathrooms, swings and playground equipment for the 2-through-12-year-old crowd," said co-founder Kristin Thomas, mother of three. "Local moms currently drive to Chesterbrook, West Chester, and Downingtown to find these amenities."

The new play equipment would cost almost \$50,000. Even with the 24/7 demands of parenthood, the newly formed "Friends of Greentree Park" took the challenge of raising money head-on. Most of the women who manage the group are currently stay-at-home moms, but hail from career backgrounds in talent management, retail sales, social work, graphic design, teaching, and public relations. They've each taken skill sets from their professional careers and applied them to the volunteer group with great success.

In June, the group held its first fundraiser, a Family Walk and Park Party, introducing the community to the need for park improvements. Throughout the summer they conducted an online public survey to allow the community to decide which equipment design they wanted at their park. At the beginning of October, more than \$6,000 was raised during a Touch-A-Truck event, where the General Wayne Elementary School parking lot was filled with fire trucks, buses, construction vehicles, and more for kids to explore.

Members also took to the

pavement, usually with children in strollers, going door-to-door asking local businesses for donations and selling coloring books. Lori Bartlett, a mother of three, is grateful to the local residents and businesses who joined the efforts to improve Greentree Park.

"It has truly been a group effort," said Lori. "So many people pitched in to make this happen, from the people who put spare change in donation cans around town, to our very own husbands, who did what we asked of them without complaint. I'm so grateful to everyone who helped us out along the way."

In just a few short months, the "Friends of Greentree Park" raised \$19,000. In October, the Board of Supervisors of Willistown Township decided to match the group's efforts with \$25,000. Hugh J. Murray, Sr., Willistown Township Manager witnessed first hand the dedication of the group. "Kristen Thomas, Lori Bartlett and Tammy V'Soske along with the many other volunteers of the "Friends of Greentree Park", did a great job organizing both the fundraising efforts as well as helping with the design of the new amenities. Our Board of Supervisors believes this is a model partnership between the community, the families who will use the new park equipment, and the taxpayers," stated Murray.

Next spring, Greentree Park's makeover will involve a Little Tykes Commercial Playset with two climbing walls, three slide variations, two different types of "monkey bars," several interactive/prettend play panels, and

a "moving" bridge. To complete the makeover, a few benches, small equipment and barrier fence are still needed.

Currently, the group is going business-to-business in Malvern, Paoli, and Newtown Square to reach the overall goal of



Lori Bartlett (left) and Kristin Thomas (right)

\$50,000. The group decided the best way to improve safety at the park while displaying community pride was to sell engraved fence pickets. Pickets are currently on sale for \$100. To purchase a fence picket or for more information about the organization efforts email friends@greentreepark@gmail.com or visit www.momsclubmalvern.org or www.willistownparks.org.

"It's been an incredible and rewarding experience and the positive response we have gotten from our neighbors has been amazing," said Lori. "More importantly, I am so glad we had the opportunity to show our children how to make positive changes in the world. Not only will they enjoy the fruits of our labor, but they have learned from our example about volunteering and giving back to the community."

Everyone involved in the "Friends of Greentree Park" group are confident that the community will continue to support the final push to raise the last few thousand dollars. Kristen's pride is evident in her statement: "More than any professional accomplishment on my resume, I am more proud to have worked for free,

with a talented group of volunteer Moms, on a project to improve our community."

This spring, instead of just a place on a map, Greentree Park will be a location filled with laughter, playing and most importantly, children being children.

GEIGERTOWN FIRE CO. BREAKFAST BUFFET

First Sunday of each month
7am - 11am

Adults: \$7.50
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