'Park within a park': New playground to be unveiled Saturday

Shannon Keith
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Landscape architect Myriah Shewchuk said the experience that best prepared her for designing playgrounds was becoming a parent.

“I had designed playgrounds for years before I had children. ... They should have never let me do that,” Shewchuk said laughing. “After becoming a parent, I gained a whole new appreciation for how a playground should be designed and constructed.”

Shewchuk, who works with The East Group in Greenville, is one of the lead designers of the all-inclusive playground that will be opening to the public Saturday at the Town Common. The city will hold a dedication ceremony for the new playground on Saturday at 10 a.m.

“This has been an amazing project to work on,” Shewchuk said. “It’s really a park within a park.”

Construction of the playground, which is the largest in Greenville, was mostly funded through a $750,000 grant the city received from Greenville-based Trillium Health Resources. Trillium has awarded 30 grants through its Play Together Accessible Playground program, which provides municipalities with funding to build fully accessible, all-inclusive playgrounds for people with special needs and physical disabilities.

Greenville Recreation and Parks Director Gary Fenton said the project also was made possible by a $45,000 donation from Greenville Utilities Commission, a $23,000 donation from Vidant Health and about $8,000 the city raised through the Town Common Playground Free Play and Landscaping Enhancements Campaign.

“Trillium is such an outstanding organization, and I can’t thank them enough for their vision in helping to build these all-inclusive playgrounds,” Fenton said. “And a lot of businesses and residents in Greenville donated to this project as well. It was really great because it showed us that people really had their heart into this playground.”

Fenton said crews started working on the project in July at the southeast corner of the Town Common. Construction was delayed for about a week last month when the Town Common was closed due to flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew, but the playground will be ready for Saturday’s opening, he said.
“These guys have done an amazing job,” Fenton said Thursday as crews were getting the playground ready for the dedication. “I come out here every morning and look around, and when I come back in the afternoon it looks completely different.”

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The approximately one-acre playground has rubberized surfaces similar to Elm Street Park and handicap-accessible equipment including the Liberty Swing, specifically designed for children in wheelchairs.

“The Liberty Swing is one of the things I am looking forward to seeing in use,” Fenton said. “It’s an incredible addition to this playground and was one of the features that Trillium said was a must.”

Other features include:

* A natural play area designed to mimic natural landscapes;
* A climbing dome;
* Ziplines;
* An adult exercise equipment station;
* A hillside slide and climber integrated into the natural landscape of the park.

“The Town Common is challenging because there is a 14-foot grade change from First Street down to the river,” Shewchuk said. “But that is what makes this playground so unique. ... It’s not something that was ordered out of a catalog and dropped onto a flat piece of land. It flows with the landscape.”

The project is part of Greenville’s Town Common Master Plan, the city’s long-term plan for the development of the park.

"We knew we wanted this playground to be at the Town Common," Fenton said. "It just made sense. ... It's everybody's park and want this to be everybody's playground.

"We also wanted to make sure that anything done with the Town Common Master Plan is done right," Fenton said. "This will set the standard for everything else we do here."

Fenton added that he considers the playground "a legacy project" for the city.

"I've been in this business for more than 40 years," Fenton said. "Some of the parks I worked at when I started my career are still around today and are serving generation after generation of people. This playground will impact people in Greenville for many years to come."

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