

The FM Rotary Club's joint community Projects

The Centennial Universal Playground

2005 was the centennial year of Rotary International. The 4 clubs at that time (Moorhead, Fargo, Fargo West and Fargo Moorhead AM Rotary Clubs) committed to a project to honor the 100-year anniversary. Plans were drawn up, and 3 representatives from each of the 4 clubs met weekly to fundraise and gather thoughts. With a total price tag of nearly \$265,000, the committee realized that contributions from non-Rotarians and businesses would be needed to make the playground a reality. A Rotarian from the Fargo Rotary Club offered to submit a non-profit status (501C3) to the IRS to obtain tax deductible contributions.

The Centennial playground project is called universal because it allows children in wheelchairs, walkers, and braces to be on the same playground as children of all abilities. But it also allows parents who are in wheelchairs to be on the playground with their children who are of all abilities. Notice the blue foam rubber type surface next to the playground. This was planned so children or adults in wheelchairs would not be injured if they tipped over onto the surface surrounding the playground.

You can see from the signage at the playground where names are placed above certain areas in the playground. These signs are recognition for businesses that have donated \$10,000 or more towards the project.

Rotarians worked with the Fargo Park Board who offered to help finance the project over a five-year period (interest free) and maintain the grounds at their own expense once the project was completed and dedicated to the public.

The bronze drinking fountain which has the inscription of the four-way test was purchased from a Rotary Club in Seattle that had advertised their fountain at the 2005 Chicago International Convention. The four FM based clubs applied for a District Grant so half the total cost of \$10,000 was paid for by District 5580.

On January 24th, 2006, the FM Rotary foundation was established as a nonprofit and it became a major tool for Rotarians in fundraising. On May 17th, 2007, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held to dedicate the playground.

The playground was originally built next to an older playground originally built by the Fargo Park Board. In 2008, the Fargo Park Board took out the old playground and replaced it with a shelter and named it the Rotary shelter in honor of what the four community Rotary clubs had accomplished.

The Rotary Play Hill and Bike Park

As kids have become more sedentary, and the amount of time in unstructured, outdoor play has declined dramatically, the FM Rotary Club Foundation board selected a Natural Playground and Bike Skills Park as the next ambitious project in December 2018. The project is located at Moorhead's Riverfront Park – 600 1st Ave. N in Moorhead, Minnesota.

This unique park will be the first large natural playground of its kind in our community, overlooking the Red River and strategically located in the community core, near both downtown Moorhead and downtown Fargo. The location was strategically selected to provide ease of access to underserved families via access from multiple modes of transportation. This site fits right into the community's "nature corridor," as it is adjacent to the Midtown Moorhead Bike Trail, the Audubon Society Urban Prairie, and a primitive hiking trail. It is also along the only lit cross country ski trail in the community, with streetlights already at the location.

The Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park include a 26-foot-high Tree House with a rope bridge to another tower, a zip line, log and boulder areas, tunnels, play mounds, balance beams, nets and climbing areas. There are over 20 features installed and planned, with most of the features already installed with the funds raised to date. The Bike Skills Park is an entry level bike park that will help kids learn basic mountain biking skills with features including a teeter totter, log roller, tabletop plank, bridge deck, mounds, rock patch and sidewinder.

The total budget is \$1.27 million. With over \$1 million raised already from over 300 donors, just \$133,000 is still needed. Some play features and elements will only be installed once the project is fully funded.

The anticipated ribbon-cutting date is in June of 2024, once the grass has been seeded and a BIG Rotary sign can be installed, along with the main sponsor signs. Upon completion, the project will be turned over to the City of Moorhead Parks & Recreation, who owns the land and is responsible for ongoing park maintenance and liability.

Early in the project, the 18-member Rotarian-led committee hired a professional Landscape Architecture firm – Confluence – with an office here in Fargo, followed by the early selection of a Construction Management firm – Gast. These firms have worked very adeptly with our Rotary committee to manage the design and construction process.

This project was a very heavy lift for our Rotarian volunteers, with over 100 meetings, many hundreds of phone calls, thousands of emails and over 300 donors (out of many more approached).

The public image impact on Rotary will be substantial, meeting both environmental and mental health needs in the community. It also serves a tourism benefit, providing a wonderful amenity for all those who visit Fargo, Moorhead & West Fargo and want to spend some time playing outside – just like we used to do back in the day!

The Miracle Field

In 2009, *The Rotarian* magazine featured an article regarding a Rotary Club building a Miracle Field for their community. Moorhead Rotarian Teresa Norwig read the article and urged the FM Rotary Foundation to consider a Miracle Field for the Fargo Moorhead community.

It was decided since we built the universal playground in Fargo that our next Foundation project should be in Moorhead. We met with Holly Heikamp who is the Director of the Moorhead Parks and Recreation Dept. who indicated they were working on building a Miracle Field but had not been very successful. They were very excited that we were going to take over the project.

There are two programs in Fargo-Moorhead that provide adaptive programming, HOPE Inc, and FM Challengers. Together there are over 200 participants that play baseball, softball or t-ball. They would play on a regular softball diamond or on a soccer field at MSUM. This was not safe, and it made it difficult for individuals with walkers, wheelchairs and braces to be able to go around the bases.

The Miracle Field is a t-ball size field with a rubberized surface which makes it more friendly for those individuals with mobility issues. We put together a team of Rotarians from each club to help in raising the funds for this project. We approached the funding for this project the same way we did the Universal Playground. We secured pledges from businesses, organizations and individuals with the opportunity to pay over a 5-year period. We received \$68,328 in in-kind donations (mostly for excavation and concrete) for a total cost of \$252,341.

Those contributing over \$5,000 (or \$1,000/year over 5 years interest free) had their company sign put on the back fence. We hired Steve Gertz to be the project manager to over see the completion of the project and charged us half of his normal fee. Volunteers from some construction companies help in laying the concrete and we contracted with Surface of America to lay the rubber surface.

We began construction in June of 2010 and on August 25, 2010, had a rubbing cutting ceremony. According to Minnesota Miracle League the field was the fastest field built in Minnesota from start to finish.

The FM Rotary Foundation applied for a District Community Grant to pay for the dugouts at a total cost of \$30,000 (\$15,000 D5580 match).