

## Dream of accessible playground closer to reality

By Clif Knight, Hartselle Enquirer

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A new enclosed playground with handicap accessible swings was opened to the public on Sunday at Sparkman Civic Center following a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by about 100 elected officials, civic club representatives and other interested citizens.

The playground represents phase one of the proposed Special Needs Accessible Playground (SNAP). It features swings, which can be safely used by individuals with handicaps, even those who are confined to a wheelchair. It also has a thick synthetic surface and is protected by a decorative wrought iron fence.

SNAP voluntary coordinator Bob Francis explained the swings were purchased by Hartselle Civitan Club three years ago and placed in storage at the civic center because the money needed to construct a concrete pad and surface for them was not available. That changed recently after the city received a state grant with the help of Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur.

“What you see here today is a labor of love for handicapped children who didn’t have a place to go play in like normal children do,” Francis said. “This is an important step in our efforts to raise the funding needed for SNAP.”

He recognized Hartselle Parks and Recreation Department, GE volunteers and Hannah Landscaping Service for their work on the project.

“I’m excited about the playground,” said Shahn Miller, the mother of a six-year-old daughter who is confined to a wheelchair. “It’s a huge blessing for us. SNAP is going to permit her to play alongside her friends who aren’t handicapped.”

A highlight of the ribbon-cutting ceremony was the presentation of a \$10,000 donation to SNAP by GE volunteers.

“This is a great day for Hartselle and Morgan County because it shows that we care about others,” Orr said. He then asked representatives of Hartselle’s four civic organizations to join him in cutting a ribbon to officially open the swing facility.

Several handicapped children were present for the event. They were asked to register and a drawing was held to determine who would have the opportunity to use the swing area first. That honor went to Larry Byrd, 13, of Hartselle. He chose to use a swing that is designed to accommodate a wheelchair.