



August 3, 2007

Morgan County Special Needs Accessible Playground - Designed to be a Destination -

The concept of a Morgan County Special Needs Accessible Playground (SNAP), evolved from a community-oriented initiative in 2002 that matured in late 2006. It was publicly introduced last December. After several months of research and detailed planning combined with the efforts of civic and benevolent organizations and thirty dedicated volunteers, the project is ready for implementation. SNAP has received the endorsement of all government entities of Morgan County as well as testimonials from elected officials and benevolent and service organizations.

A comprehensive, well organized fund raising campaign is being implemented. The project, which is estimated to cost \$600,000 and includes considerable in-kind work and materials, will be accomplished entirely through charitable giving and grants. The scheduled completion is in the Spring of 2008. This unique playground is intended to serve more than 1700 physically challenged children in Morgan County alone and others in the region. It is to be a model for other communities, regionally and nationally, to recognize the need for play accommodations for special needs children.

SNAP has been designed by a professional firm which specializes in special needs playgrounds throughout Alabama. This firm was directed to design SNAP as the premier Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) playground in the state with an emphasis not only on accessibility, but also on equipment usability by children with a vast array of physical challenges. ADA requirements were considered a mandatory criterion in specifying equipment and design of the playground.

The completed design satisfies the full intent of developing the facility to be a "destination attraction" in Alabama. The playground will also be appealing to and usable by children who are not physically challenged, thus encouraging interaction with those having special needs. This is important because the feeling of being different, often experienced by special needs children, is minimized or vanishes altogether. Additionally, comfort and convenience of accompanying adults have been addressed by providing ample and convenient parking, abundant landscaping, public restrooms, water fountains, seating, shade from the sun and appealing aesthetics. The design features a 1900 sq. ft. splash pad with 21 individual play stations, parallel assist bars and touch activators. The remainder of the playground has 35 individual play stations as well as customized ramps and platforms. All play areas are surfaced with poured-in-place colored rubber surface with provisions for

graphics. Enhancements include colorful and prominent SNAP logo-bearing shades to promote a merry environment and offer comfort from the sun.

Along with design activities, a professional marketing firm has developed a comprehensive marketing plan to include a web site (www.snapplayground.org) so anyone can learn more about the project, ask on-line questions, review past and upcoming events, read testimonials and published articles and make contributions or pledges. To ensure that the playground maintains a high profile in the public eye, a variety of television commercials, including interviews have been produced. It is noteworthy that this firm provided their services free of charge.

The implementing organization, staffed with dedicated volunteers, offers the necessary business and professional ability as well as the experience to ensure success through functional areas of project management, marketing, publicity, fund raising, special events and construction.

During research for SNAP, it was apparent that numerous special needs accessible playgrounds either now exist or are planned across the state. Such worthy efforts deserve support and encouragement for the same compassionate reasons that motivate the SNAP organization. However, by developing SNAP as a model “ADA” accessible facility, the standard will be elevated.

Demographics and travel accessibility to the site to optimize countywide utilization were prime considerations in locating the playground in Hartselle. Being near the geographic center of the county, Hartselle offers equitable travel times from outlying communities and is near the more densely populated areas, thus, miles traveled per child throughout the county are relatively balanced.

A Sparkman Park location satisfies the general location requirements. Within Sparkman Park, a number of sites offered by the City of Hartselle were considered. In addition to the all important factors of safety and well being, specific site location factors considered were: (1) Ambient environment ensuring that the children feel broadly included and accepted; (2) Utilities – treated water for the splash pad, lighting, restrooms and drinking water; (3) Vehicle access and parking; and (4) Surveillance, operation and maintenance of the playground.

The selected site satisfies all of these factors while minimizing infrastructure costs. Most importantly, the ambient environment remains consistent with numerous recreation and sports facilities in the surrounding area. Contiguous to the playground are the Municipal Swimming Pool, Ruben Sims Baseball Field, tennis courts and the Civic Center which houses several youth basketball courts. Nearby, the Sparkman Park complex also offers youth baseball, softball and soccer fields. Therefore, the paramount factor of inclusion is satisfied. Also, parents with more than one child have the option to supervise their special needs children while their other children may participate in other activities.

All site selection factors are convincingly satisfied. The following examples illustrate the extent of the analytical selection process:

- 1. Location adjacent to the swimming pool offers two major advantages:
 - (a) The option of one-stop, multiple participation by families and**
 - (b) Treated water from the swimming pool will be circulated to serve the splash pad thus minimizing plumbing installation and conserving water.****
- 2. Close proximity to the office of the Director of Parks and Recreation allows continual observation of playground activities and operation by a trained and responsible staff.**

In conclusion, the need for and the substance of the SNAP project is widely recognized as compelling with increasing endorsement and support by individuals, businesses, volunteer and benevolent organizations and government entities throughout Morgan County. It is particularly noted that all governing bodies in the county (The County Commission and the seven municipalities of Decatur, Eva, Falkville, Hartselle, Priceville, Somerville and Trinity) have, by formal vote endorsed the project and encouraged all citizens to join in their support for an invaluable addition to Morgan County.

Please join in this support “Because Every Child Should Have a Playground.”