



A playground for all: Albany YMCA to build all-adaptive structure



From: Albany Democrat-Herald by Kayla Nguyen

Albany, Or. (Sep. 9, 2022) – To make way for the new — what’s billed as the mid-Willamette Valley’s first fully inclusive, accessible play structure — first comes the out-with-the-old part, aka demo, or at least repurposing.

On Thursday afternoon, Sept. 8, the Mid-Willamette Family YMCA’s atmosphere thrummed with excited energy as a group of volunteers dismantled a large children’s play structure. Children cheered while workers carried playground parts and rolled tires out of the courtyard. Nearby, Albany Mayor Alex Johnson II smiled at the scene.

The event, phase one of a larger revitalization project, set the stage for the all-adaptive, fully accessible playground.

“There are thousands of kids that come to the YMCA with physical challenges,” Tino Barreras, YMCA chief communications officer, said. “We want to make sure there are no limitations and no barriers for them to learn, grow and play with everyone.”

The idea for the new playground sparked 1 1/2 years ago but did not gain momentum until May, when the project caught the attention of the Republic Services Charitable Foundation, Barreras said.

Recognizing the value in the facility’s efforts, Republic Services awarded the YMCA \$250,000 as part of its National Neighborhood Promise program.

Republic's Municipal Manager Julie Jackson said that the playground project "just seemed like the perfect fit" for the highly selective grant because of its emphasis on inclusivity for all kids, regardless of ability.

"We are just so thrilled to be giving them the money, and so proud of the work that they're doing," Jackson said.

Modular in design, the new 7,200-square-foot playground will include slides that kids can strap into, multiple swing sets and wheelchair ramps. It will also stand on a special kind of turf that absorbs sound and friction, ensuring that even the ground accommodates kids with sensory and physical impairments.

"Every piece of this has been engineered for any kind of special need, while at the same time being fun for anyone who wants to play on a playground," Jackson said.

"Kids of all abilities will be able to participate in this new playground, which is really exciting," Barreras said. "We want to make sure that no one feels left out."

Meanwhile, the deconstructed playground is set to be reassembled at Mighty Explorer Preschool, 325 Pacific Blvd., for continued usage.

Even with the grant, the YMCA is short funds, by \$500,000, Barreras said. To learn more about the project or make a donation, visit www.ymcaalbany.org.

The new structure is set to be fully completed in the fall of 2023. Excavations to make way for the turf begin next week.

"This is going to be a safe, friendly place for kids who have disabilities or conditions that don't let them play on traditional playgrounds," Jackson said. "I just hope that it becomes a destination for families of all kinds of kids."

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