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New playground a big hit with the kids

By Kimberley Haas
khaas@fosters.com

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MADBURY — It's a bit of an early Christmas present for the students at Moharimet Elementary School. Their new playground, finished last weekend, has been a big hit, according to those involved with the project.

"Some of the quotes on Facebook were amazing. Things like 'There was no trouble getting out of bed today!' and the kids in second grade were saying they wish they were in kindergarten again so they would have two more years to play on it," Andrew Gault, one of the volunteers who helped to pull together the new playground, said.

Gault has a daughter in third grade at the school, but he said the main reason he volunteered his time to the project, which has been three years in the making, was because he grew up in Madbury and feels a strong connection to the community.

"My whole younger half of my family went to school here. It's a great way to give back," Gault said. Gault is one of 11 children.

As the owner of Gault Builders, he had some experience with construction. Having a hands-on project is what drove up the volunteer participation from men in the community, school principal Dennis Harrington said.



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John Huff/Staff photographer Dozens of strong backs lift a giant section of a slide into place at Moharimet School in Madbury last Saturday.

"I've been in education and schools all my life and I've seen more men in the last few weeks than ever," Harrington said.

Some 106 volunteers were on hand for the final day of construction, Harrington said.

Second-grade teacher Jayne Winsor said the opportunity to teach her class about the value of volunteering was not missed, even though the children in her class are not yet old enough to help with heavy construction.

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John Huff/Staff photographer Principal Dennis Harrington weather seals wood on a new section of jungle gym at Moharimet School in Madbury last Saturday as hundreds of volunteers completely rebuild the playground.

“We were looking for something authentic and meaningful for the kids to do. What’s more near and dear to kids than their playground?” Winsor said.

Winsor said all of the second-graders participated in making posters and writing thank you notes.

Second-graders thanked everyone as they came inside for lunch last Saturday, said Brett Gibson, the father of twin girls in second grade at Moharimet.

Gibson said his girls were a little hesitant before the demolition of the old playground but were “so excited” when the new playground was completed.

It wasn't just parents that were involved. Matthew Kimball, a brother at Phi Mu Delta at UNH, said working on the project is a way he and his brothers can lead with

their values.

“I love it. Our fraternity is brand new on campus. It just restarted last year and that’s what we like to do,” Kimball said.

Katie Fiermonti and Rebecca Kell, who were involved since the beginning, said the first two years of the project were dedicated to designing the new playground and raising the money for it. By the end of the 2013 school year, \$32,000 was in the bank and the planning for construction could begin.

“There were PTO silent auctions, which were a direct ask. We sent out solicitation letters and over 90 people sent in checks. We made \$1,300 by hosting Mr. Harrington’s famous curry dinner. We also put out donation jars,” Kell said.

The Parents Teacher Organization dedicated \$10,000 to the project, Kell said.

Fiermonti said volunteering for this project will stick with her.

“If nothing else, this is the biggest, most positive building experience I have ever been involved in.”

Learning Structures in Strafford, which built the original playground at Moharimet, helped with this project. Ricci Lumber in Portsmouth discounted all of the building materials. Their contributions were a big help, Fiermonti and Kell said.



Click image to enlarge

John Huff/Staff photographer Dozens of strong backs lift a giant section of a slide into place at Moharimet School in Madbury last Saturday as hundreds of volunteers completely rebuild the playground.



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Haas/Democrat photo More than 100 volunteers came together to make the dream of a new playground at Moharimet Elementary School in Madbury a reality last Saturday. From left are Matthew Kimball, Andrew Gault, Principal Dennis Harrington and Brett Gibson standing in the new playground.

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