

# Play 4 All Park moving closer to opening

Facility will enable children of all abilities to play together



The All Phase Construction Crew begins paving the parking lot and main oval within Play 4 All Park in Vacaville. (Tom Phillippi — contributed photo).

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PUBLISHED: February 1, 2021 at 9:10 a.m. | UPDATED: February 1, 2021 at 9:44 a.m.

“Well, I think it’s fine, building jumbo planes/Or taking a ride on a cosmic train/Switch on summer from a slot machine/Get what you want to if you want, ’cause you can get anything/I know we’ve come a long way/ We’re changing day to day/But tell me, where do the children play?”

Cat Stevens wrote and sang those lyrics in 1970, but the words are just as applicable if not more so today. Vacaville will soon have an answer to his question: one place children of all abilities will be able to play will be Vacaville’s Play 4 All Park.

The concept was birthed nine years ago when Tom Phillippi, who runs a local civil engineering firm, visited his grandchildren in Round Rock, Texas. They went to a new park called Play for All Park and Tom’s son Matt approached him in tears.

“I said, ‘Matt, what’s wrong?’” recalled Tom. “And he said, ‘I just saw the coolest thing ever. I saw a little boy helping a blind girl go down a slide.’ So I said, ‘Okay, I’m going to do anything and everything I can to try and have something like this in Vacaville.’”

That dream is close to reality. In September 2019, Phillippi and friends broke ground for the park in an area along Old Alamo Creek on the east side of Leisure Town Road and the north side of Elmira Road.

They had hoped to open the park the next spring.

“We got some grading done and then the winter came and the project sat,” said Phillippi. “And then when we were getting ready to start up again, the pandemic came and we were delayed even more... We’ve had several contractors who are donating services. One completely closed for three months and then when they came out of that, they need to first take care of their own businesses before they could turn around and start thinking about donations for a park. And I totally got it. It just was phenomenal gestures on a lot of these folks’ part. We have people who are donating thousands and thousands of dollars of equivalent in-kind services.”



Tom Phillippi’s granddaughter Maisie King rides around the Vaca Village oval in Play 4 All Park in Vacaville. (Tom Phillippi — contributed photo)

The construction crews resumed work in the last month or two. All the basic infrastructure is now in place — water lines, sewer lines, and storm drain lines. They have also installed an oval roadway in the center of the park called Vaca Village for scooters and wheelchairs and have completed phase one of the parking lot. Next comes the landscaping, picnic structures, and play equipment. The goal is to complete the first phase of the park by late spring or early summer, when it can be opened to the public.

That depends in large part on fundraising. COVID-19 forced Phillippi and company to cancel two fundraisers, so they are playing catch up now.

“It has slowed us down, but we’re happy with it,” he said. “We’re continuing to press forward even in the midst of the difficulties.”

Two planned play structures are designed for kids in wheelchairs but can be used by all children. One is called a We-Go Round. The rotating mechanism is below ground so the apparatus is level with the ground and has center handholds. The other is a swing for children in wheelchairs. The main play area has a wheelchair ramp throughout, and there are tactile areas for the visually impaired.

“The whole idea of the park is for kids of all abilities to be playing together,” said Phillippi. “So many times in a park you will see the play structure in a sandpit surrounded by a little concrete ring to hold the sand in. Well, what is a child in a wheelchair or a child that is blind going to do in a situation like that? How is he going to interact? And that’s where this is going to be totally different.”

In phase two the children will be able to play together on two baseball fields, each a partial replica of a Major League ballpark. One will be patterned after Fenway Park in Boston, complete with a 14-foot-high “Green Monster” leftfield wall. The other will be made in the image of the San Francisco Giants’ Oracle Park, including the iconic brick arches of the rightfield wall. The infield will be rubberized asphalt so that children in wheelchairs can navigate the basepaths.

The ballparks are sized for T-ball, Challenger leagues (for children with disabilities), and even for adult Wiffleball.

“We’re trying to make it fun for everybody,” said Phillippi, “The adults who can recognize these ballparks will have fun just being there. We’re just really excited about all of this.”

There will even be a splash pad behind the rightfield wall in the miniature Oracle Park. It will be called McCovey Cove.

“All kids will be able to run through it, even a child in a wheelchair,” said Phillippi, “because it will be the kind of thing where the water squirts up and there will be no curbs and they will be able to run through it on a hot day.”

The back of the rightfield wall will be the Wall of Fame, listing all the donors to Play 4 All Park. Local merchants who have contributed to the park will also be honored via storefronts with their names on each picnic structure. The structure will be open on three sides, but the false front will bear the name of local businesses, such as Kaiser Hospital or Ace Hardware. The structures will ring the Vaca Village oval.

One unique picnic structure will be that of Wasserman Travel. The late Morry Wasserman was a B-17 bomber pilot in World War II. So the play area will feature a

zipline with the cutout of a B-17 bomber on top and the structure will look like an airplane hangar. One of the seats on the zipline will be for ambulatory children and the other will be a bucket swing for those with disabilities.

Phillippi, a Rotarian, rallied his fellow members to get behind the project after his son's moving words to him in Texas.

"They loved the idea and immediately jumped on board and it became a major project for us," said Phillippi.

"And as we were moving forward, it became evident that this was going to be a way bigger project than just Rotary and that we were going to need to involve the entire community."

Seven years ago they started a committee and formed a 501(c) (3) called Play 4 All Park, Inc.

"We reached out to experts throughout the community," said Phillippi. "We have had on our committee pediatric therapists from Kaiser. We talked to the principal at the Irene Larsen (special education) Center, just as many people as we could to find out what would work. We then also started exploring — where could we put a park like this?"

Phillippi was working on a development called The Farm at Alamo Creek.

"I talked to my clients and said, 'Hey, we have this idea to build a park for kids with disabilities.' And they said, 'We're on board. What do you need?' I said, 'How about 7 ½ acres?' And they said, 'Sounds great!' And so they donated 7 ½ acres. So we started planning and fundraising and all of that has happened over the last 6-7 years. It's been quite a journey for sure."

Those wanting to support the project can design and purchase their own commemorative brick to be installed in the park. To learn about this and other donation opportunities and more about the park, visit [play4allvacaville.org](http://play4allvacaville.org).



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