

## with disabilities

# Can-Do Playground designed for children Facility open to all children

By Adam Zewe  
Staff Reporter

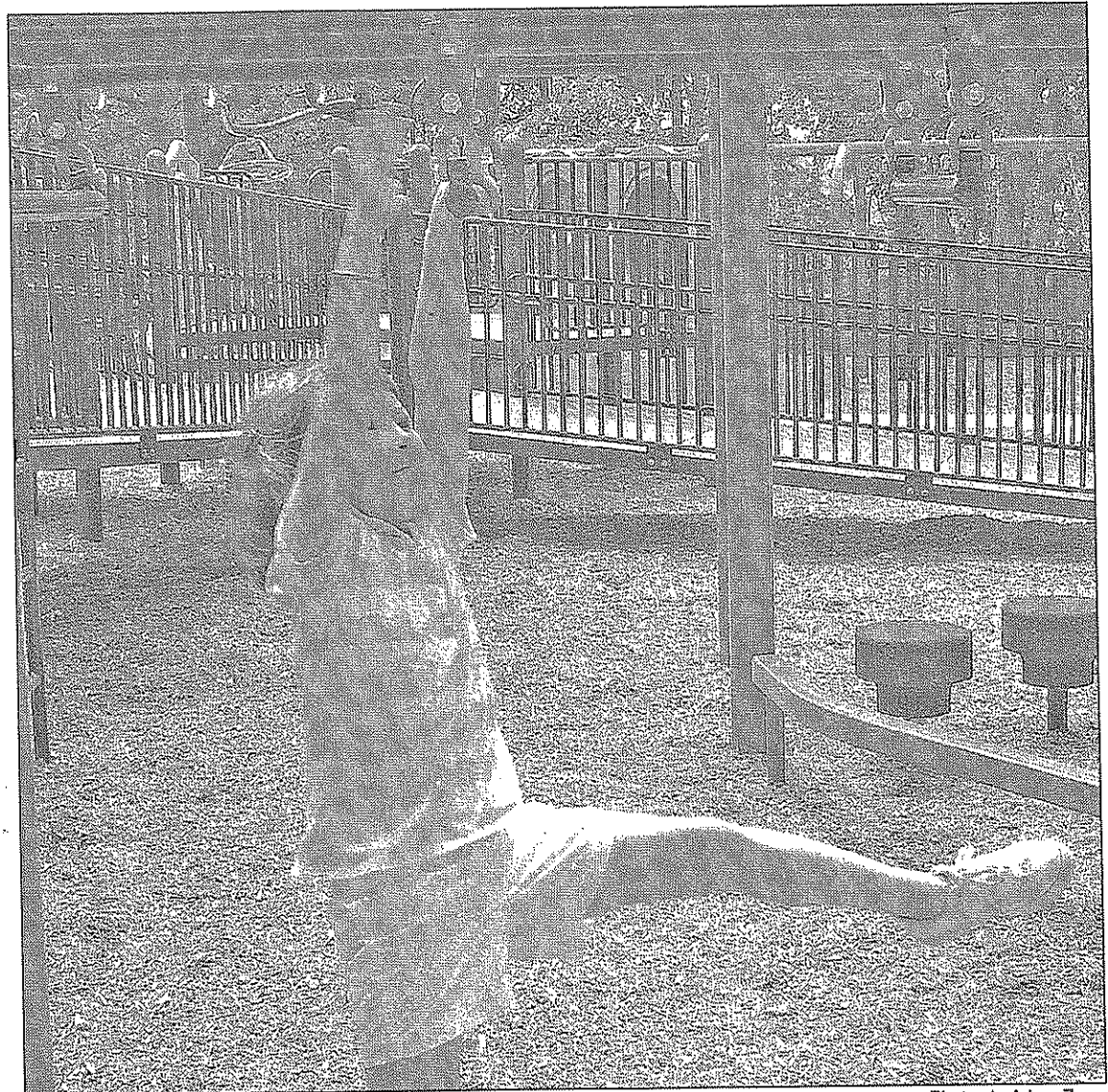
More than 150 Rotarians, community members, state and local government representatives and children waited patiently for their turn on the slide. They gathered on July 11 for the grand opening of the Can-Do Playground.

The 23,000 square foot playground, located at the intersection of Foulk and Weldin Roads in the Alapocas State Park, is unique because it is designed so children with any physical, cognitive, or sensory disability can use the equipment.

The six Wilmington-area rotary clubs that collaborated to design, fund, and build the playground used the grand opening to explain how the project began and thank those who made it possible.

"We had a vision of a playground where all children could play together," said Tom Talley, of the Brandywine Rotary Club. "That vision has driven us for the past four years and we have never wavered from it."

The clubs — Brandywine, Naamans, Wilmington West, Caesar Rodney, Brandywine Hundred, and Wilmington — formed a partnership in 2003 and began working on the Can-Do Playground.



Photos by Adam Zewe

**Abbey Todd, 5, stretches to reach the next rung of the monkey bars at the grand opening of the Can-Do Playground in Brandywine.**

On July 11, Tom Talley of the Brandywine Rotary Club and Chazz Salkin, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, cut the ribbon and opened the playground to the public.

The Division of Parks and Recreation will be in charge of the playground because it is on state park land.

Many of the children at the grand opening, anxious to try out the equipment, had ducked under the golden ribbon and were already on the playground.

Rotary volunteers gave tours and answered questions about the unique playground equipment, accessible to every child.

"There are 8,000 children with disabilities in Delaware who had no playground to go to. We've changed that," Talley said.

Every area of the Can-Do Playground is accessible from concrete sidewalks, the equipment has double-wide wheel chair ramps, the swings have back and arm supports and some of the sand boxes are elevated so children in wheel chairs can reach them.

The entire playground is designed with disabled children in mind. There are individual play areas for autistic children who like to play alone and balancing games, which are popular with children who have Down syndrome.

Suzanne Hurt, of Newark, has a 6-year-old autistic son,



**Tom Talley (Left) and Richard Rothrock unveil the entryway sculpture Rothrock carved out of a piece of granite he found on the site.**

Ethan. She watched excitedly as he slid down one of the playground's slides.

"We're going to be here a lot. People show a lot more understanding at a playground like this. Plus, it's good for me to be around other parents of disabled children. This is great for stress relief," she said.

Hurt explained that when she takes Ethan to a regular playground, many of the other parents and children assume his overenthusiastic behavior is because he's misbehaving, when it is really caused by his autism. She is confident the environment at the Can-Do Playground will be more open and understanding.

Karleen Troyan was also excited for the grand opening of the playground. She works at the Mary Campbell Center in Wilmington, a home for children with disabilities, and brought a group of children

from the Center to the playground.

"I think this is just wonderful," she said. "It's great to see an equalizing playground for people with special needs."

Families came from as far away as Pennsylvania and New Jersey to try out the unique equipment at the playground. The first child arrived at the playground at 7:45 a.m., long before the playground was officially opened at noon.

"I think this playground is really cool," said Sarah White, 13, of New Cumberland, Penn., while carefully crossing a balance beam. "A lot of kids of different ages can play on it and there are a lot of different things to do."

The playground is divided into three sections for children of different ages. The Alpha section has equipment for children aged 2 to 5, the Beta section is a giant sand-

box for children of all ages, and the Gamma section has the most challenging climbing and balancing equipment, designed for children aged 5 to 12.

While the children played on the equipment and the parents toured the ground, Amy Jaffe Barzach, creator of playgrounds for disabled children, called Boundless Playgrounds, watched approvingly.

"It is powerful for me to see the amount of heart that the volunteers put into this project," she said. "This is the perfect example of what a community can do when it comes together."

She came to the grand opening to inaugurate the Can-Do Playground as the 110th Boundless Playground in the country.

Barzach, executive director of the Center for Boundless Playgrounds, which worked as a consultant on the Can-Do Playground project.

Barzach said the Can-Do Playground is the perfect example of a Boundless Playground, where any child can reach the highest point and use any of the equipment. She was also impressed by the double-wide wheel chair ramps, an idea she had never seen before on a Boundless Playground.

Talley hopes that at least two more Boundless Playgrounds are built in Delaware, one in Kent the other in Sussex Counties.

"I hope that the Can-Do Playground will become the standard for all future playgrounds in the state," he said.

# State officials, Rotarians work together to build playground

By Adam Zewe  
Staff Reporter

Six Wilmington-area rotary clubs gathered at Alapocas State Park July 11 to open the Can-Do Playground for the public.

The Brandywine, Wilmington, Naamans, Caesar Rodney, Wilmington West and Brandywine Hundred Rotary Clubs worked together for four years to make the Can-Do Playground a reality. The playground is the first Boundless Playground in Delaware.

A Boundless Playground is a playground where the equipment is specially designed so children with any disability can access and use it.

In 2003, the rotary clubs decided to undertake a large-scale project for the 100th anniversary of Rotary International. Ron Nordheimer, of Brandywine Hundred, brought the idea of a Boundless Playground to the other rotary clubs.

They formed a nonprofit corporation, the Wilmington Area Rotary Clubs Community Fund, to design, fund, and complete the playground. The corporation was staffed with members from all six rotary clubs.

Club members approached state officials and found that the Division of Parks and Recreation wanted to put a playground into the new Alapocas State Park. The Division of Parks offered the clubs a 26,000 square foot area of land for the playground and provided \$500,000 of site preparation work.

The Can-Do Playground became a part of the Blue Ball Project, a state-managed initiative to improve the area around the Blue Ball Barn at the intersection of Routes 202 and 141 in Wilmington.

Rotarians and representatives from the Division of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Transportation worked together to design and build the playground.

The rotary corporation raised \$489,500 from Rotarians and corporations and purchased the specialized playground equipment from West Recreation, of Queenstown, Md.

The Can-Do Playground will be maintained and managed by the Division of State Parks because it is on state park land. The Rotarians have created a trust fund to help provide for the maintenance and expansion of the playground in the future.