

Fully accessible playground to level park's playing field

MONTGOMERY: Fund-raising is under way to create a dream playground.

By **Stephanie Pass**
The Times Herald-Record

It started as a dream, but in a few months a very real children's playground will take shape in Orange County. It will break not only ground but human barriers.

Called Sally's Dream, the playground, to be built in Thomas Bull Memorial Park in Montgomery, will feature all the usual fare, such as slides and swings.

But it will also offer special equipment to enable children with disabilities to have full access to activities usually inaccessible to them. "It'll have everything a regular playground has," said Joseph O'Connell, director of the Family Empowerment Council (FEC), which provides advocacy and services to local people with disabilities. "It just won't preclude disabled kids from participating."

Ramps and platform bridges will connect play stations, holding "activity boards," with items ranging from puzzles to musical instruments. Some swing sets will have platforms that hold wheelchairs, O'Connell noted.

One swing will have a 6-foot-wide basket in which a parent could hold a child. Some swings can be used by children without use of their legs, O'Connell said.

And being located in the county park, the playground will potentially serve thousands of people in a 60-mile radius,

including Orange, Ulster, Sullivan and Rockland counties.

The playground is a memorial to the late Sally McGlynn, council co-founder. An advocate for people with disabilities, she helped to found the Independent Living Centers in the county, serving as resources for people with disabilities.

McGlynn had seen how her wheelchair-bound son was excluded from traditional playground activities. She dreamed of a playground for all children.

After she died, the FEC led fund-raising events to raise the \$200,000 needed for such a playground. To date, the council has collected \$135,000.

Local nonprofit agencies have donated. Crystal Run Village contributed \$5,000. The annual Walter Luedke Memorial Golf Classic raised more than \$60,000, including the outing and a sports auction.

The Junior League of Orange County is running a raffle to pay for a "disabled-friendly" swing set, O'Connell said.

On June 17, the FEC will hold a walk-athon from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Thomas Bull Park.

The FEC received a \$2,500 grant on Nov. 16 from Orange and Rockland Utilities' Community Investment Committee, said O&R spokesman Mike Donovan. It will pay for a sand play area that will include a sandbox with decking for seating as well as elevated play tables. Children in wheelchairs can use mechanical cranes to gather sand.

Construction of the playground will begin in August or September, O'Connell said, and is expected to be done by October.