

Playground turns fantasy into reality

By Amy Berkowitz
Times Herald-Record
aberkowitz@th-record.com

Campbell Hall - Like any 8-year-old, Shannon Sutton wanted to climb to the top of the large slide near her Middletown home and cruise down to the bottom into the arms of her mother, Jennifer.

But due to her spinal muscular atrophy, which saps her muscles of strength, Shannon could only look up and imagine what it would be like to reach the top.

Now, Shannon can turn fantasy into reality.

Sally's Dream is a specially designed playground recently built at Thomas Bull Memorial Park that is accessible for disabled children like Shannon.

Sally's Dream was recently completed after three-and-a-half years of fund-raising, planning and finally building.

The Family Empowerment Council, a nonprofit agency founded by parents of disabled children, provides services for people with disabilities in Orange and Sullivan counties. The council wanted to honor the memory of Sarah "Sally" McGlynn, one of its founders and board members.

McGlynn was a crusader for the disabled for 30 years. She was involved in developing independent living centers in this area and was active in the CP Center for cerebral palsy, now called Inspire, in Goshen. She died in 1999.

Graham Skea, Orange County commissioner of parks, recreation and conservation, said this park is "first-rate."

How to help

The Family Empowerment Council would like to continue to build on Sally's Dream. They want to construct a wheelchair-accessible maze and they also need a creative person to build a wheelchair-accessible carousel. If you would like to volunteer, call 343-8100. Or, if you would like to make a donation, make checks payable to Sally's Dream, c/o Family Empowerment Council, 225 Dolson Ave. Suite 403, Middletown 10940.



Times Herald-Record/DOMINICK FIORILLE

Sally's Dream Playground, sponsored by the Family Empowerment Council Inc., officially opened at the picnic grove in Orange County Park in the Town of Hamptonburgh.

Skea, his staff, Family Empowerment and hundreds of volunteers all had a hand in installing the ramps, putting down special mulch for wheelchairs to ride over, handicapped-accessible swings (for both parents and children to sit in simultaneously), hanging rings, a sandbox and slides. There is also a special rubberized surface underneath the equipment to prevent injuries if a child should fall.

Joseph Freyer of Newburgh owns a dry-wall business and helped put together the playground with his brother-in-law, Pat Broderick of Yonkers.

Freyer didn't need much convincing to work on his weekend off. He just looked into his 6-year-old daughter Amanda's big blue eyes and knew it was worth it. Aman-

da is autistic and has epilepsy, but her mother, Mary, said Amanda couldn't wait to get on the swings.

The sandbox at Sally's Dream is where miracles happen for Anthony Pratti. Anthony is autistic and has cerebral palsy. The 4 1/2-year-old boy communicates through facial expressions and sign language. He gets around with a walker or by crawling.

Many children with autism have skin-sensitivity problems. His mother, Gina, said some autistic children can't bear to be hugged or touched.

Anthony joyfully lets the sand pour through his hands, and when Gina asks him if he is done playing, he shakes his head "no."

That's when Gina thanks Sally for a dream come true.