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Dedication Of Healing Hearts Playground Celebrated At New Regional Hospice Center For Comfort Care & Healing

By Nancy K. Crevier

Wednesday, November 12, 2014



Photo: *Nancy K. Crevier*

Cynthia E. Roy, president and CEO of Regional Hospice and Home Care, left, and Paul Sirois, executive director of Regional Hospice Foundation, thank KIDO member

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Ashley Santore for her part in for raising more than \$50,000 to build a playground at the site of the Regional Hospice Center of Comfort, Care, & Healing, scheduled to open in 2015. KIDO founder Ryan Patrick is third from right. Other KIDO members are Newtown High School students Allie Paynter, Caroline “Charli” Condon, Gregory Brissette, Brian Montoya, and Joshua Dunn. KOMPAN North East sales director Andrew Kimball, far right, extends his congratulations to the students. Siblings Madeline Patrick, far left, and Kaylin Brissette, front, joined KIDO members.



Photo: *Nancy K. Crevier*

A small bell mounted to the exterior of the Healing Hearts wing of Regional Hospice Center of Comfort, Care, & Healing, and overlooking the playground, is inscribed with the names of the founding members of KIDO.

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Photo: *Nancy K. Crevier*

Ropes and arches create a heart-shaped play tunnel, a one-of-a-kind design by KOMPAN Play Institute of North America. Newtown-based youth organization KIDO raised the money to pay for the cost of creating a playground for the Healing Hearts Center's new location.

DANBURY — With shy smiles and a twinkle of excitement in their eyes, seven members of Kids In Deed Organization (KIDO) posed for pictures in front of the heartstrings tunnel, a piece of playground equipment designed exclusively for Healing Hearts Center for Grief and Loss, by Kompan Play Institute of North America. The dedication of the playground on the grounds of the Regional Hospice Center of Comfort, Care & Healing construction site at 30 Millstone Road, in Danbury, took place Monday afternoon, November 7.

The playground was funded through the efforts of a number of Newtown Middle School students, headed by Ryan Patrick, now a student at Newtown High School. In 2012, Ryan, at the time a 12-year-old Newtown Middle School student, sold wristbands commemorating 12/14, when 26 children and educators lost their lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“There was no stopping him,” recalled Ryan’s mother, Barbara Patrick. “It was December 15, at 7 am, and there he was at the computer, designing this wristband. I asked him what he was doing, and he said ‘I have to help the victims.’ He was 12 years old,” said Ms Patrick.

Within the first week, more than \$8,000 was raised, the beginning of the first \$24,000 that the family would donate to the Healing Hearts Center,

which provided free grief counseling to families who lost loved ones at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Healing Hearts is a program of Regional Hospice, currently located at 73 Stadley Rough Road in Danbury, and offers bereavement support to thousands of families in Connecticut and New York. It will be housed in a wing of the new Regional Hospice Center when the facility opens.

Ryan was successful in having several of his friends join him in fundraising. In 2013, they formed the Kids In Deed Organization (KIDO), meeting after school. KIDO is dedicated to raising money for Healing Hearts Center for Grief and Loss, and accepted the center's challenge to raise \$50,000.

"The center told them that if they could raise \$50,000, they would build the playground [at the new 30 Milestone location]," Ms Patrick said. The young people quickly accepted the challenge. Greg Brissette, Caroline Condon, Josh Dunn, Brian Montoya, Allie Paynter and Ashley Santore are members of KIDO, along with Ryan.

The playground outside the Healing Hearts wing of the new Regional Hospice Center was paid for through KIDO's efforts for the past two years, such as gift wrapping at a Barnes & Noble Bookstore; a shopping/benefit event at Newbury Place in Southbury; selling ornaments, candy and hot chocolate at various events; and fundraisers at Peachwave and at Rita's Custard in Bethel. KIDO raised more than \$50,000 to purchase the playground designed by Kompan.

According to a November 4 press release from Regional Hospice, "Kompan designed the climbing structure especially for the Healing Hearts Playground with ropes and heart-shaped arches creating a heart-shaped tunnel for children to climb through, around, and up and down. Jane Didona of Didona Associates Landscape Architects in Danbury was instrumental in designing the climbing piece in collaboration with Andrew Kimball and Samantha Jeffrey from Kompan."

Kompan playgrounds are designed using extensive research into child development to improve childhood health and learning.

Kompan donated the spring rocker and seesaw, according to Andrew Kimball, North East Sales director for Kompan, and provided the tunnel and installation of the playground at cost.

"Kompan's support of the Sandy Hook children's playgrounds, and its longstanding community support and involvement in innovative children's playgrounds, is the reason we chose it to design and supply our playscape equipment," said Cynthia E. Roy, president and CEO of Regional Hospice and Home Care. "We are thrilled they designed a specialty heartstring play piece specifically for our Healing Hearts

playground,” she said.

The Best Story

On Monday afternoon, with KIDO’s friends and family and special guests present, Ms Roy and Regional Hospice Foundation executive director Paul Sirois thanked the young people.

“We are eternally grateful to you. This is a legacy for years to come,” said Ms Roy. “Thanks to all of the moms and dads who supported the kids,” Ms Roy added, saying that it was their belief in their children that helped KIDO succeed.

“This building has many donors,” pointed out Mr Sirois. “This is by far the best story we can tell,” he said, gesturing toward the playground and students. “You have inspired other donors,” he assured KIDO members.

Throughout the process of creating the new playground, KIDO was reluctant to be recognized, Mr Sirois said, but builders felt it was important to do so. So, a colored Unilock stone has been installed on the playground, recognizing the group. Additionally, Mr Sirois said, “Knowing you were influenced by 12/14, we are adding a bell inscribed to all of the kids in KIDO,” Mr Sirois added. The brass bell is situated on an exterior wall of the building, facing the playground.

“Thank you, founding members of KIDO,” he said. “I’m sure KIDO will continue on. I think this story brings us pretty close to tears, every time we tell it,” Mr Sirois said.

Mr Kimball took a moment to address the gathering, as well. “When Kompan had the opportunity to get behind a project like this, there was no saying, No,” he said. “It is amazing what these kids did.”

The heartstrings tunnel structure is the only play tunnel like it in the world, he said, designed specifically for this playground. Later, he added, “We wanted to be a part of this. [The heartstrings tunnel] is almost like a sculpture, and it doesn’t take away from what this building is,” he said. Muted colors, rather than the typical brilliant colors used in most playground designs, respect the home and future inhabitants, he said.

Newtown First Selectman Pat Llodra was present for the dedication, thanking the group and thanking the adults who have supported KIDO.

“It is that kind of support system that allows kids to do these kinds of things,” Mrs Llodra said following the ceremony.

“It’s incredibly special. We need to reward the good works of young

people,” she said. “I want these kids to know how special they are. I am very proud of them. They’ll look back at this one day,” Mrs Llodra predicted, “as an anchor point. It is a wonderful affirmation of their humanity.”

“We are honored to work with the new Regional Hospice Center and the efforts of the students to raise money for this playground. We know that play has a healing effect on children. In play, you focus on the now,” said Helle Burlingame, manager of the Kompan Play Institute, in the November 4 press release. “By immersing yourself in both challenging physical play and also collaborative group play, the Healing Hearts Playground sets the stage for immediate connections and well-being between children,” Ms Burlingame said.

“I’m so proud of these kids,” Ms Patrick said, as the KIDO members dispersed for pizza and a tour of the facility. “Ryan said to me, that he wants other kids to know they can make a difference.”

The Regional Hospice Center for Comfort Care & Healing is the state’s first and only private-room family centered hospice residence. It plans to accept patients in January.

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