

# RECREATION MANAGEMENT

THE MAGAZINE WITH IDEAS & SOLUTIONS FOR RECREATION, SPORTS & FITNESS FACILITIES MANAGERS

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## Playgrounds

### All Playgrounds Are Not Created Equal

*Rosedale Recreation Center in Washington, D.C.*

By Mahboud Nobakht

One of the best-known sentences in American history states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Optimistic and beautiful as those words may be, we would be naïve to believe them to be true. According to the World Health Organization, over a billion people live with some form of disability, which corresponds to about 15 percent of the world's population. On average 150 million people have very significant difficulties in functioning. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that more than 50 million Americans have a disability—18 percent of our population. At least 6 million children have some form of disability, ranging from learning disorders to severe mental and physical special needs. Playgrounds and public spaces should be areas where equal access is provided for different abilities.

In 1992, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 became effective. This federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and requires that newly constructed and altered state and local government facilities, places of public accommodation, and commercial facilities be readily accessible to, and usable by, individuals with disabilities. Recreational facilities, including play areas, are among the facilities required to comply with the ADA, and that gives more children the right to pursue happiness on a playground.

On May 31, 2013, Washington D.C.'s Mayor Vincent C. Gray, joined by city officials and community residents, cut the ribbon for the grand opening of the District's first fully inclusive playground. The playground, located at Rosedale Recreation Center, is the first of 32 playgrounds to be renovated under the Play DC program—a multi-year initiative to renovate the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) playgrounds across the city. It is the largest playground renovation project in the District's history.

"Improving every resident's quality of life is one of the main goals of my One City Action Plan. Every child in the District should have a safe and inviting place to play," said Mayor Gray. "Renovating these playgrounds is an investment in the well-being of our children that will pay dividends for years to come."

Originally, the Rosedale playground was slated to be a small "tot lot." The project scope was later expanded to become DPR's first totally inclusive play space, meaning that the site and play equipment are accessible for children and caregivers of all abilities. The playground was designed to further physical, cognitive, sensory and social skills. With more than 12,000 square feet of play area, the Rosedale Playground offers something for everyone. The National Mall-themed play equipment was designed especially for Rosedale. Custom elements include miniature structures of the White House, U.S. Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington Monument, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, Natural History Museum, and the Air and Space Museum. Park visitors can learn about the monuments through interpretive panels on each of the features. The panels will include a description of the monuments in English and Braille, and will include push-to-talk buttons that enable the users to hear the same descriptions in English, Spanish, Amharic, Vietnamese, Chinese, French or Korean. The play equipment includes an extensive ramping system that

allows children and families of all abilities access to all points on the structure. The ramps are wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass each other or travel through the equipment together. Seating within the play equipment was included to allow caregivers or children an opportunity to rest when needed. Sensory elements were also included, such as finger mazes, musical instruments, talk tubes, a sensory play center and more. There are also quiet places for imaginary play or for children who may prefer fewer stimuli, and the OmniSpin spinner is a high-backed version of a merry-go-round that allows children to be transferred into the equipment from a wheelchair or walker, which is good for sensory play, building social skills, and teamwork. In addition, there is a Sway Fun glider with room for two wheelchairs, plus two large benches for other passengers.

DPR and the D.C. Department of General Services (DGS) have hosted community meetings throughout the District to discuss the overall Play DC project, as well as each individual play-space project, to ensure the newly renovated play spaces meet the needs and reflect the uniqueness of District neighborhoods. District residents, community groups and children were encouraged to provide feedback on the design and site amenities for each play space, which was then taken into consideration for the planning and final construction of each play space.

"DPR is excited to create play spaces with unique equipment that challenges the social and physical development of children in the District of Columbia," said Jesús Aguirre, director of D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation. "Our goal is to create play spaces that encourage our families to come and play for many years to come."

#### **Project Info:**

- **Opening Date:** May 31, 2013
- **Cost:** \$1,496,000
- **Size:** 12,000 square feet
- **Program Managers:** Brailsford & Dunlavey, along with joint-venture partner McKissack & McKissack
- **General Contractor:** Blue Skye Construction/Coakley & Williams Construction
- **Playground Equipment:** Landscape Structures and Sparks at Play
- **Sustainability:** The playground is comprised of 37 percent recycled materials. The Pebbleflex surface is water-permeable, which contributes to the Mayor's citywide stormwater management initiative.
- 98 percent of the playground products were produced in the United States.
- More than 50 percent of the subcontractors used in construction of the Rosedale Recreation Center project were LSDBE businesses. Of these subcontractors, more than 35 percent were small or disadvantaged businesses.
- The Rosedale Recreation Center Project created more than 10 new jobs for D.C. residents.

#### ***FOR MORE INFORMATION***

Washington D.C. Department of Parks & Recreation: [dpr.dc.gov](http://dpr.dc.gov)

Washington D.C. Department of General Services: [dpr.dc.gov](http://dpr.dc.gov)

Brailsford & Dunlavey Inc.: [www.programmanagers.com](http://www.programmanagers.com)

#### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

**Mahboud Nobakht**, a Project Manager with Brailsford & Dunlavey in Washington, D.C., has extensive experience in project planning and implementation, and has been associated with nearly 3 million square feet of new projects in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan area with contract values totaling over \$1.4 billion dollars. His contracting portfolio includes construction of commercial office buildings and interior fit-outs, healthcare, community recreation, aviation, and renovation projects. Nobakht's core competencies include estimating, scheduling, procurement and public approvals, as part of pre-construction services; contract administration, risk management and project controls, as part of construction services. In addition to working on program management assignments, he has presented an educational session on community recreation at the Virginia Recreation and Parks Society's annual conference and has also written publications for parks and recreation journals.

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