

Parents' dream turns into kids' paradise in Renwick Community matches local funds dollar for dollar

By Kent Thompson

What began as a solitary idea has developed into a community project that will benefit children and families for generations.

The town of Renwick today has a new playground with nearly a dozen new pieces of equipment, thanks to a community-wide fundraising effort and matching grant dollars from both the Humboldt County Community Foundation, the Wright County Foundation and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

A group of concerned parents, Gidget Trask, Crystal Engstrom and Courtney Palmer, approached Renwick City Council member Rick Larson last summer about raising funds for new playground equipment in the Renwick City Park.

"I'm on the city council, and I thought it was a good venture worth pursuing," said Larson, who joined Trask, Engstrom and Palmer on the Renwick Project Playground Committee.

"There was some concern from the citizens in town as to whether or not we could raise enough money, and what things we could do," Larson said.

"We had a community meeting in early October last year, and about 15 people showed up. They gave us some guidance on what things they wanted done and how we should go about asking for funds," he added.

Fundraising a success

A mass mailing soliciting funds was sent out, not just to Renwick citizens, but to rural residents and businesses and individuals in the nearby towns of Humboldt, Clarion and Eagle Grove.

"We started off with only about \$1,000 or \$1,500, then we really got serious about it," Larson said.

In January, the committee applied for a grant from the Humboldt County



Children volunteers at the Renwick playground project last week, pose for a photo on the new bongo climber, one of nearly a dozen pieces of new playground equipment at the Renwick City Park. Pictured bottom row from left: Keaton Trask and Channing Smith. Second row from left: Ethan Rudolph, Micha Rudolph, Morgan Johnson, Casey Johnson, Jordan Smith and Caden Kvale. Top row from left: Ben Rudolph, Madeline Havlik, Landon Wolf and Justin Wolf. Humboldt Independent photo.



Volunteers gathered at the Renwick City Park on Aug. 29, to spread about 150 tons of pea gravel around newly installed playground equipment at the Renwick City Park. The community was able to fundraise more than \$85,000 for a playground improvement and city park update. Front row from left: Justin Wolf, Gidget Trask, Courtney Palmer, Crystal Engstrom, Amy Rudolph, Jill Eckhoff, Bridget Trask, Kasara Smith and Terry Meyer. Second row from left: Matt Trask, Matt Nervig, Chad Palmer, Jay Rudolph, Jon Nissen, Josh Engstrom, Monty Hokas, Matt Havlik, Larry Meyer, Tom Fisher, Jake Kvale, Logan Anderson, Taylor Kunert and Mary Nissen. Top row from left: Channing Smith, Ethan Rudolph, Ben Rudolph, Landon Wolf, Caden Kvale, Keaton Trask, Micah Rudolph and Jordan Smith. Humboldt Independent photo.

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Community Foundation. The group asked for \$7,500 and received \$10,000.

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"That really helped jump start the effort to raise funds," Larson said. The community also received \$300 from the Wright County Foundation.

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In late January, the playground committee had a community meal for a freewill offering and an auction.



"We were hoping to get 50 items donated and we wound up getting 97," Engstrom said.

Committee members agreed that the community was very supportive of the project.

"We raised about \$8,000 from the meal and the auction. Combined with our other donations and the grant, we had about \$35,000 toward our initial goal of \$50,000," Larson said.

"We were just very surprised and overwhelmed with the community support. We received a lot of funds from alumni from the Boone Valley area that we didn't even know about," Larson said.

The local committee worked with Mid-Iowa Council of Governments (MIDAS) in Fort Dodge in writing a grant for competitive matching funds.

"We were up against big cities and conservation boards from larger counties for projects. There were 16 applications that were accepted and we scored second of all of them," Larson said proudly.

The committee received word early this summer that it had received the \$34,500 matching grant from the Iowa DNR. That basically doubled the local funds that were raised.

At the time of construction (early last week), the playground project had raised \$85,600. It not only allowed many new playground pieces to be purchased but will provide funds for other remodeling projects in the city park, and will also provide for maintenance and upkeep of the park and equipment for many years to come.

On Wednesday, Aug. 29, a work night was held at the park with about three dozen local volunteers using skid loaders, end loaders and rakes and shovels to spread and even up pea gravel around the new playground pieces, making the equipment ready for kids to enjoy this past Labor Day weekend.

"We are really happy with the turnout. It was nice to see a lot of kids here to help, and to see the support of the community. We are very happy and pleased," Engstrom said.

"Miracle (playground equipment manufacturer) told us they have a never seen a town of this size do a project of this scope," Palmer added.

For more details on the playground and more photos, see this week's Humboldt Independent print edition.

