



# A Place to Play

BY CLAIRE ARMANN

THERE ARE MANY PLAYGROUNDS in Newark, Delaware, for parents to enjoy with their children. However, none offer accommodations for children with special needs. This is not due to a lack of demand, but a lack of inclusivity for these children.

That is changing with Deb Buenaga and Nic DeCaire, who teamed up to build Preston's Playground. They first collaborated when creating the Inclusion 5K, a 5K event for people of all mobility levels. The vision for this playground came after the success of the second Inclusion 5K in October 2015, and their combined energy and love for special needs advocacy. Preston's Playground is focused on building an all-inclusive, safe playground, with adaptive equipment for children. For the last three years, the duo championed this concept and has been raising funds to make it a reality.

Buenaga has always been an advocate for accessibility and inclusion because her son, Preston, has mitochondrial disease. Mitochondrial disease affects the energy level of those diagnosed with it and makes participating in physical activities more difficult. Her family is very active, and it was not always easy finding play equipment suitable for Preston. She founded Preston's March for Energy six years ago, which is an organization that

raises money to provide children with adaptive bicycles and other equipment. Buenaga said, "The main goal in my mind was including everyone and always promoting inclusion."

DeCaire runs Fusion Fitness center and has worked with Preston's March for Energy and other charitable causes that benefit children with special needs. These experiences led him to see the need for adaptable playgrounds and equipment for children. Prior to working on Preston's Playground, the Special Olympics Delaware powerlifting team trained at Fusion Fitness. He said the playground "has allowed me to help spread the message of inclusion and get people involved in fundraising. It has brought joy to many people's lives already."

With the help of Corrado Construction, construction of the 8,000-square-foot playground began in June 2018 and is located at the Newark Reservoir. The land was donated by New Castle Parks and Recreation and the City of Newark donated all the underground facilities for restrooms. EDis did an extensive computer layout and used concrete donated by Heritage Concrete to get the foundation of the playground ready.

Buenaga's sister is the CFO of Playcore, a playground equipment compa-



ny, and was able to offer equipment at a discounted cost. The playground has a rubber play surface and wheelchair accessible entrances, equipment, parking and restrooms. Over 100 volunteers from throughout the Newark community came out to help with construction.

With an initial goal of \$250,000, Preston's Playground raised more than double that thanks to the generosity of many sponsors. The likes of which are also State Chamber members: EDiS, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Sallie Mae and Nemours Fund. Andy DiSabatino of EDiS said, "Little by little we raised enough money to purchase the playground equipment, which is really the biggest expense of all." He added that building the playground has been "an absolute team effort." ■



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