

A Playground for a New Millennium



Old playground, built in 1980. Former student contemplating, moments before it was taken down on Friday, 14 September 2001



*New playground, shortly before completion, Saturday, 22 September 2001
Note how the leaves have changed in eight short days*

An Extraordinary 'Barn Raising'

by Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett

September 2001 was a busy month for volunteers in Brentwood, as parents and teachers and community members erected two new playgrounds in the community for children and grandchildren from near and far. Our new Dr. Coffin playground, as did its time worn predecessor, has its own unique character. Our extensive group of volunteers has many stories to tell about its development and construction. The tremendous efforts put forth by so many individuals, both in the planning and building, and in the donations of time, equipment, and food for the workers, continues the tradition of fostering community at Dr. Coffin School.

The timing of our installation happened to be directly in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States; a stunned time, with no shortage of global concern, worry, and fear. It was therapeutically heartening, indeed profound, to be involved in such a positive, community based project, that brought a multigenerational, multilingual, and multiethnic group of people together in a common endeavor. For our children. For our future.

The environmental colors of the new Dr. Coffin playground are in keeping with the surroundings, and do not compromise the fantastic mountain panorama for the students or the school's neighbors. The colors looked fantastic with the green and yellow backdrop of Whispering Woods, as it was installed on the weekend of the autumnal equinox ... a weekend of strengthening balance and harmony in our ever vibrant community.



An early Chinook arch builds and the site is ready to begin reconstruction



The ground is marked, ready for auguring. Nose Hill Park is in the background



Guiding the bobcat's augur into place for the postholes



Assembling the borders



The gravels turned to cobbles, impossible for the augur. We had to trench, and set forms to hold the concrete for each of the posts



The first posts go in



Assembling the nuts and bolts



Piecing in the platforms



Crimping tight the chains



Resting with tools



Steadying the ladder



Night approaches, and the headlights come on



Continuing under moonlight, until all the posts are finally placed



Morning brings the workers back



Shoveling dirt into wheelbarrows



More shoveling, leveling the ground



The University of Calgary Wrestling Team, coached by one of our school's parents, lends a hand with the final leveling, and then moved mounds of pea gravel into place in record time



Finally it is complete, as the sun sets on the evening of the autumnal equinox

Dr. E.W. Coffin - Brentwood Heights Millennium Playground

by Jennifer Jeffrey, parent
Chair, Playground Committee

Amidst the destruction of the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001, Dr. Coffin School was fortunate enough to be involved in the building of a new playground ... the effect of which was pure magic for the community. Sometimes phrases like "community spirit" can sound cliché but to the many people involved in the project it almost seems like an understatement.

Our small committee could never have known, when it formed in the Fall of 2000, what far reaching needs it would meet. Sure, we knew that it was time to replace the old playground. Current standards of safety and new playground designs in light of how children play were an impetus for change. Even though the wood was showing its age, attachments to the old playground were strong. Several children requested a piece of wood for keepsakes- a testament to their sentimentality toward it. Many young adults recall the building of that first playground when they were students. We felt strongly, as parents and teachers, that the children at Dr. Coffin worked hard and deserved to have a new play area to keep the balance in their lives.

The design of a structure, whether it is a bench, playground, or building has distinctive characteristics which people respond to. One mother enthused about the design of the old benches. The slats, she said were perfect for her toddlers to shuffle along and therefore learn to walk. One other parent told of hanging from the monkey bars when they felt stressed. Who knew?! Our design features a circuit-like plan to keep the children (or adults) moving around as they like to do in 'tag.'

What a beautiful backdrop we had to work with at our school! The mountain view is beautiful and inspiring and now we can all think of ourselves as having a place with a view. We decided early on that the new playground would feature natural colours so as to blend in, rather than compete, with the view. It was also a way of paying homage to the old structure. This must have been a somewhat unusual choice because the Blue Imp foreman asked to check the 3D plan when he didn't see any red components being unloaded from the truck.

On September 14, the demolition began in beautiful, clear weather. The following week in the morning a great Chinook arch filled the sky and seemed to bless the project. But, as it happens in real life, everything was not going to go smoothly. In fact the ground was proving to be more than a little rocky. Auguring was very slow and laborious. We had to switch methods for filling the holes in the ground to support the posts. The interesting thing was that nobody complained- it just kind of brought us closer in achieving our goal and we made more trips for coffee and snacks.

All the teachers came out by the afternoon and that day we worked well into the night. The moon of the Autumnal Equinox was out and headlights from cars and trucks shone on people working to finish digging those holes. It was truly heartening to see everyone contributing whatever they could toward the goal of making our playground... whether it was a smile, encouraging words, expertise, food or drink. All of these things helped us to feel like a community and to take ownership of our new structure. Many people couldn't seem to leave the work in progress, it was so enlivening.

The process of putting together this new playground was just as much fun for the committee and community as the final product is for the children. The spot is still a meeting place, though now we've traded splinters for calluses. ... But nobody's minding- we're too busy playing!



A schoolwide celebration, Monday, 24 September 2001



The children are assembled, ready to play. The Sun Circle, the school, and Nose Hill are in the background



Arming the students with bubbles of celebration

Four students cut the ribbon. It's time to PLAY!!!

