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Time to play: Ribbon cut on new playground at Little Su Rotary Park

By Katie Stavick Frontiersman.com
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Susitna Rotary President Kim Erickson, Houston Mayor Carter Cole, and Susitna Rotary Jack Timm, who has “put a gazillion hours into this,” cut the ribbon on the new playground for the Little Susitna Rotary Park in Houston on Aug 9.

J. David McChesney/Frontiersman



Volunteers and members of the Susitna Rotary Club came one step closer Aug. 9 to fulfilling a long-term vision to create a safe, welcoming spot for people to fish, picnic, read, and relax as the Little Susitna Rotary Park opened a kids’ playground.

Volunteers got busy at the Little Susitna Day Use Park in Houston is a popular for fishing and boating, that has only gained in popularity, according to Susitna Rotary member Lanissa Grogan.

“Years ago, you would see only three, maybe four cars here. Now, it’s amazing. People have been coming out and the parking lot will be almost full. It’s so great.”

She explained that during a past Little Su Classic, when volunteers come out to clean up the Little Su riverbanks to make it safer for watercraft, another Rotary member had an encounter with someone attempting to break into their car, and that lit a fire for her to want to open up the area in an effort to turn the tide of criminal and drug behavior people often ran into when they wanted to fish or take their boats out at the boat launch.

“I wanted to open it up. I wanted people to see this area from the Parks Highway. If it’s visible, bad behavior seems to stay away.” Grogan said plans kicked into gear in 2019, but had to be pushed back the next year due to the COVID-19 pandemic pushed plans back. But the Susitna Rotary was not deterred and after Grogan applied for a Rotary grant, setting everything in motion, she says. They first built the pavilion that allows people to gather and picnic, later clearing out brush to create the foundation for a trail along the Little Su.

The playground was made possible through grants, and members credit the hard work of Grogan and her husband Rob, along with Jack Timm who has “put a gazillion hours into this,” for bringing the park to life.

“I think it’s amazing,” said Felicity Young, a volunteer and mother of five who came out to help with the playground. “We love having another playground in the area. Especially where there’s kayaking and fishing. They’ve done a really good job.”

“This was a long-term plan that, when we started planning, was to have a playground for this space,” said Susitna Rotary President Kim Erickson, adding that the grant was for planning the playground, and when Timm found the playground equipment, the Rotary decided to make it work.

“We all scrambled and just decided we’re not only planning, but we’re building,” said Erickson. “The Rotary received the plans in June and got to work.”

“I love it. I think it’s wonderful,” noted Houston May Carter Cole, on hand for the ribbon cutting.

Visitors to the Little Su Day Use Park will also notice other recent improvements, including a riverside trail that was built last year last year with a children's reading trail featuring "Josh the Otter," a safer and easier landing or launch point for boaters, and the Kids Don't Float loaner board for children to grab a life jacket if they don't have one already.

Another new improvement is new pavement to the parking lot and connecting to the pedestrian pathway already in place to improve park access for seniors and those with mobility issues.

Future improvements planned are a forest trail boardwalk the will utilize recycled plastic molded into wood. Plans are also in the works for a community flower garden, and to extend the trail to loop around to Little Millers.

For more information about the Susitna Rotary, please visit www.susitnarotary.org/