

BIG TOY,

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A smaller group of volunteers returned Monday. By the end of the day Caillier, the project coordinator, announced more wood fiber chips needed to be ordered and likely wouldn't come in until at least Thursday, June 18. That left the opening date somewhat in flux, as the playground can't be opened until the wood chips and the other 23 items on the final punch list are done.

"We can't open until we get more wood chips," Caillier said Monday afternoon. "We used less rock than expected, so we ended up using more wood fiber chips than expected because we didn't meet the height requirement. We are short of materials. It takes three days to get more material, so we probably won't see it until Thursday."

Late Tuesday afternoon, Caillier had another update.

"We will have the wood fiber Friday afternoon," Caillier said. "We will open the playground at 9 a.m. Saturday."

In the months leading up to the build, having enough volunteers had been a concern. Project leaders were hoping for 150 volunteers per shift, with three shifts per day. Ron and Kim Freeman headed up the effort to sign up volunteers, but the reassurance from officials at project consultant Leathers and Associates was a majority of volunteers usually walked in without signing up prior.

In Keizer's case volunteers did indeed walk up, but not enough. A lack of bodies put the project behind early.

"We were short on volunteers," Caillier said on Thursday evening. "We wanted 150 per shift and were 50 percent off. Right now we could use all the help we can get."

Kim Freeman noted there were some big groups that came. Boys and Girls Club came Thursday with 70 people, while Lakepoint Community Church and Dayspring Fellowship Church both had big groups Friday evening.

Some city employees took vacation days to be at the site every day, while others were paid by the city for working there.

Throughout the five scheduled days of the build, Shelly Paddock provided daycare and Carolyn Ream worked with youth such as Anthony Divine.

"It's something to do other than being home," Divine said.

By Friday, the playground was taking shape, though the project was still behind due to a shortage of volunteers.

"We're still behind, but we're making up ground," Caillier said Friday evening.

Caillier noted Doug Hanauer, the lead consultant on hand from Leathers, was constantly on the phone with co-workers about making changes on the fly. Other issues included a tube on the treehouse structure being too long – it had to be cut to fit – and the level of gravel not being high enough. Plus there were users not familiar with some of the tools.

"We've broken more than 100 drill bits so far," Caillier said.

Two construction captains, Steve Ray and David Louden, were injured during the build.

By late Sunday afternoon, it became apparent the 5 p.m. goal would not be met.

"We had half as many volunteers as we expected, but they worked twice as hard as expected," said Caillier, who noted work continued until about 10 p.m. both Friday and Saturday in an effort to make up time.

Before he left Monday, Hanauer expressed his appreciation for the work volunteers did, though he joked about Caillier's math.

"The volunteers we had here were phenomenal," Hanauer said. "They were good workers, easy and friendly to work with. They did more than average. But they didn't do twice as much, because we were four or five hours away (from opening Sunday). We didn't miss it by much. There are just so many variables on a project like this."

Though some parts are common to different projects, Hanauer noted no two Leathers playgrounds are identical.

"Each one is totally different, though some components are the same," said Hanauer, who has supervised more than 200 builds in 23 years. "There are a lot of swings on this one. The kids in Keizer wanted a volcano and a castle. Probably the volcano is the most unique part of this one."

In addition to a structure sponsored by the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes, the Keizer Big Toy also has references to McNary High School, a steamboat with a paddle wheel, a beaver bar and a fire truck mister sponsored by Marion County Fire District No. 1. Another unique feature is the Wallace House structure.

"Kids want something from their own environment," Hanauer said. "Cookie cutter companies can't have it reflect the community like we can. It looks pretty darn good."

Brad and Meredith Coy worked on the Big Toy while their four children were with Paddock.

"We weren't really building a play structure, we were really building a community," Brad Coy said. "That we were highly successful at."

Meredith Coy predicted regular trips to the park this summer.

"We are super excited," she said. "I'm sure we will be here every day. They feel this is their playground."

Clark and every councilor talked about the project near the end of Monday's Keizer City Council meeting, with several getting emotional.

"One thing I want to say is we did it," said Parsons, who chaired the Community Build Task Force. "This has been a roller coaster for two years. To come to what we've accomplished is a great thing."

Clark choked up as she echoed those thoughts.

"You go out there now, it's the most amazing playground I've ever seen," the mayor said. "We did it. I'm so moved by what we did as a community. It will be there for so many years for people to enjoy. We all own a piece of that. We can look at that with so much pride."

By late Tuesday afternoon, Caillier said those still working on the project were getting through the punch list "pretty quick." Final coats of paint and sealer had to be applied, a steering wheel was needed for the Ford F100 and some sharp edges had to be smoothed.

"I believe we'll be ready to open on Saturday," Caillier said.



Top: Bill Lawyer and members of the Marion County Fire District No. 1 look over a tube on Friday morning that caused headaches before being trimmed to fit. Above: Volunteers work on the volcano slide and other parts of the Big Toy project on Sunday afternoon.

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