

New playgrounds installed in Gearhart

Committee meets goal to have structure installed by spring break 2015

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Gearhart Elementary School has two new playgrounds.

They arrived March 14, delivered by truck to the school, where a large group of community members waited, eager to install them despite chilly wind and rain.

The shiny blue playgrounds are made possible by the efforts of the 10-member Gearhart Playground Project Committee and local donations of time, money, labor and materials.

"This really is a community project," said Erin Jackson, a member of the playground committee, a subgroup of the school's Parent-Teacher-Student Organization. Without volunteers, the project never would have materialized, she said.

When Gearhart's only existing playgrounds, located outside the school, started deteriorating last spring, the idea to replace them was born. Two slides broke on one of the structures, which were nearly 30 years old, third-grade teacher Suzi Regan said.

"The kids said, 'we should do something about that,' and I said, 'you're right,'" she said.

The playground committee was formed to address the problem. The group, which includes teachers, parents and Principal Juli Wozniak, set a goal to have the play sets ready for use by spring break 2015. That



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

Dozens of community members showed up at Gearhart Elementary School March 14 to help install two new playgrounds on the school's campus. The playgrounds were purchased with funds raised by the Gearhart Playground Project Committee, a subgroup of the Parent-Teacher Organization.



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

Lori Toyooka, left, and Erin Jackson, members of the Gearhart Playground Project Committee, help unload parts for Gearhart's new playground March 14. Dozens of people from the community showed up over the weekend to help put up two new playgrounds at Gearhart Elementary School. The Gearhart playground project has been an ongoing effort for about a year.

goal was accomplished last weekend with the help of several dozen community members who showed up on a rainy morning and worked long hours to install the equipment.

The North Coast Building Industry Association rounded up about 10 build-

ers and construction workers to do the specialized labor; the association also obtained donations of machinery and materials for the project. Warrenton's A-1 Ready Mix poured concrete for the playground sites.

The playground sets, which were selected with



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

Gearhart Elementary School replaced its two existing playgrounds, which were about 30 years old, with new structures. Community members started installing the play sets last weekend, and the work was completed this week. The Gearhart Playground Project Committee's goal was to have the structures installed by spring break 2015.

input from the elementary students, are environmentally friendly, handicap-accessible and able to withstand the coastal weather. Both are designated for kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The playgrounds aren't exclusively for elementary students,

however: The public can use them year-round.

"We hope it gets used throughout the summer," Jackson said.

The playground equipment cost about \$70,000. A majority of those funds were raised through a dinner and auction at the Asto-

ria Golf and Country Club in November. The rest came from a Turkey Trot Fun Run the week before Thanksgiving; a family night-out fundraiser at McMenamins Gearhart Hotel and Sand Trap Pub last fall; and individual donations from citizens and businesses.

In the chess club, there's always something new to learn

Chess from Page 1A

Gearhart's second year

Dan King is leading Gearhart Elementary School's chess club into its second year, but the program still is gaining traction.

King started a chess club at Seaside Heights Elementary School in 1980. The club lasted about 20 years and took part in the state chess tournament about a dozen of those years. King took a hiatus until about six years ago, when a former chess club member approached him at Costco and told him the impact the club had on him.

"At that point, I knew in my heart, even though I was burned out from going to state tournaments, I could still do chess club, so I started up again," he said.

He left Seaside Heights about a year and a half ago and went to Gearhart, where he reignited the chess club that had been there in the 1980s. The club started its second season in early November with Friday afternoon meetings. In addition to about 15 student participants, King has help from several parent volunteers, some of whom were on his team at Seaside Heights. The club is targeted toward fourth- and fifth-graders, but King is open to having younger students participate, as well.

Opportunity for advancement

At Seaside High School, senior Kris Booth tried to get a chess program started this year for his Pacifica Project but he was not able to garner the attention and interest he needed, said Booth's mentor Eddie Park, Sage Park's grandfather.

"The inertia was just too great



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

The Gearhart Elementary School chess club started its second year a few weeks ago, under the guidance of Dan King. The club, which is open to all students, has garnered the interest about 15 students and a few parent volunteers so far this year.

for him to overcome," he said. "But, we will try again next year."

The goal is to spread the word about chess in the community, give students the opportunity to play and, eventually, start a competition team. Another aspect of the club will be interacting with elementary and middle school students.

The players

Sometimes people underestimate the ability of children to grasp the technical nuances of chess, but even first-graders or younger students can start learning the game, King said.

He and David Rouse believe the benefits of playing are numerous: improved problem-solving skills, strategic thinking, confidence, work ethic and creativity.

Despite what the activity has to offer, scholastic chess is not widely promoted in the school district;

there is not a chess club at Seaside Heights Elementary School. The Knappa and Jewell school districts don't have chess clubs, either.

If students had more opportunities to play during or after school, King believes their interest in the game would increase in turn. Instruction at home also can affect the activity's presence in the community.

Students probably are not as exposed to chess in their homes as they used to be, he suggested.

"There were a lot more kids playing chess with their parents in the 1980s and 1990s than there are today," he said, adding that, in his experience, "the kids who were really successful were also playing at home."

For instance, Sage Park has been playing since she was 4 years old under her grandfather's guidance. Now she is one of the only local students indi-

vidually seeking out competitions to attend.

Crystal Rouse said she'd be interested in competing, as well, but she first wants to get "way more practice." Luckily for her, her father and grandfather are available to give her that practice.

In the future

Eddie Park hopes the clubs' long-term goal is to help students qualify for the Oregon Scholastic Chess Federation State Tournament in April. To attend, students must first compete in two qualifying events and establish a Northwest Scholastic Rating System or United States Chess Federation rating. Even though the state tournament is held in Seaside, Sage Park will be the first student from Clatsop County to participate when she attends the tournament this April.

Park also wants to make Seaside the site of qualifying tournaments in the future, which is a possibility, according to Jeff Dobbins, an Oregon Scholastic Chess Federation board member.

"The great thing about the Oregon Scholastic Chess Federation is that we're very flexible," he said, adding a parent volunteer or teacher can put on a qualifying tournament. "The goal of the organization was to get more people to set up tournaments and run them on their own."

The state tournament is open for students ages 5 through 19, or kindergartners through high school seniors. It also offers a separate section, called the Friends and Family Section, for adults and other students who haven't qualified. The students in that section get to play four games and get a sense of the event, Dobbins said.

By participating in tournaments, he said, competitors become "very aware of the consequences of their actions" in a controlled setting.

"You know, at the end of the game, how well you do and whether you win or lose is really up to you and the choices you made," he said.

They also have the opportunity to meet and play against people from all over the state who share a common interest.

The federation's state tournament is not a qualifying event for a national competition, but the winners of the high school and middle school divisions are nominated to represent the state at the national Denker Tournament of High School Champions and the Dewain Barber Tournament of K-8 Champions tournaments, respectively. The top-rated girls also are nominated to play in national women-only events.

David Rouse said he is waiting to see if attending tournaments will be feasible for the club. For now, he wants to focus on instruction and practice, and he believes eventually the program will attract students who want to compete.

Gearhart Elementary School's program is strictly recreational at this point, King said, and he prefers to keep it that way. He said he wants "students to be proud that they know how to play chess, and to continue to play chess through their adult lives."

He has taught more than 1,000 people to play chess in his life, and some of his proudest moments are when those people tell him they still play the game.

"That's what will melt my heart," he said.



COMING SOON TO SEASIDE!

ROYAL CAB LLC
Locally Owned & Operated by Travis Weichal, since 1996

Call us for your transportation needs—we will make you happy!

• SMOKE FREE • BIKE RACKS ON ALL VEHICLES

Astoria, Warrenton, Seaside
503-325-5818

Long Beach, WA
360-665-3500

www.royalcab.net