



New Charlotte playground for the young at heart

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Isolation and inactivity can be a deadly combination for older adults.

And so, a partnership between Mecklenburg's park and recreation department and the nonprofit Southminster retirement community is taking a fresh crack at the issue by opening a new "multi-generational" playground.

Through its community fund, Southminster donated nearly \$200,000 for the specially designed equipment for children and outdoor fitness equipment for adults including cardio and resistance machines. It opened in mid-October at Marion Diehl Park, 2219 Tyvola Road.

The "opening of the park is hopefully just the beginning of the story," said Tracy McGinnis, director of philanthropy at Southminster, and the initiator of the project. She said Southminster has a graduate school intern who will look at how the park is being used and research ways it can expand the project.

McGinnis noted that in addition to the exercise equipment, the park offers a walking track and additional space for socializing and relaxing. Future plans for the space include community programs such as health education events and outdoor exercise classes.

“Research tells us that social interaction can go a long way preventing isolation and subsequent depression at any age, but it is particularly crucial for older adults whose life transitions can find them alone,” said Marcia Scheideman, formerly of the Shepherd’s Center of Charlotte, a nonprofit that provides learning programs and services to older adults. “This playground will provide seniors a unique opportunity to participate in activities with others and develop social connections.”

BENEFITS FOR ALL

Cross generational play has positive benefits for both young and old, says Julie Schmidt, assistant professor of sociology at Queens University of Charlotte.

“For children, seeing elders in active, social environments can help reduce the fear and break down negative stereotypes of the aging process,” said Schmidt. “For older adults, social support is beneficial in enhancing self-esteem, well-being, and can reduce symptoms of depression.”

Schmidt noted with families today often more geographically dispersed than previous generations, intergenerational families are often not living in the same city. “Having an opportunity to share wisdom and experience with the younger generation can be helpful in creating a sense of value for older adults.”

LIVING A LIFE WITH PURPOSE

Part of the Charlotte community since 1987, Southminster also offers its residents other opportunities to connect with youngsters in the community.

“We’ve collaborated on a community garden/greenhouse project at South Meck High for several years,” said Stewart Wiley, director of sales and marketing at Southminster, “It’s wonderful to see the exchanges and the friendships that develop.”

He said residents are also involved in tutoring and mentoring students at Quail Hollow Middle School and Smithfield Elementary.

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