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Splashpad!



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Kosciusko County has been blessed with an abundance of natural bodies of water, and its numerous lakes allow for many enjoyable family activities. Swimming and water sports are a great way to cool off on a hot summer day, but imagine being a child who is physically or mentally challenged who might not be able to participate in the fun. While siblings and friends play in the lake, you will have to be on the sidelines, just watching. And what if you were a mom with small children who want to cool off in the water, but you don't feel like you can keep an eye on your preschooler and your toddler at the same time to keep them both safe? What if you don't know how to swim, but you still want to be able to get wet with your family? Imagine being a parent with little or no yard in which your children can play during the hot summer months, and the nearby lake is closed due to high levels of e-coli bacteria. Playing in water is a part of summer fun for groups of all ages, and it's certainly a rite of childhood. Adding a Splashpad to Kosciusko County would provide a positive water play experience for the entire community that all age groups of all abilities could enjoy.

A Splashpad is basically a safe aquatic playground that features different areas of interactive water elements and play experiences. Splashpads are different from pools in that they have zero depth standing water so the need for lifeguards is eliminated as there is practically no risk of drowning, and the Splashpad floor features textured non-slip concrete for added safety ("Splash Pad"). There are no pinch points or exposed bolts as found on traditional playground equipment (Smith). Some of the water activities that can be included in a Splashpad range from a simple water nozzle that sprays water into the air, to a rainbow, a mushroom shower or a series of buckets a few feet off the ground that fill with water and dump at various times. Splashpads can be designed to feature play experiences for children of

all developmental levels, including a discovery area for toddlers and young children, an exploration area for elementary age children, and a high energy area for group play (Design Guidelines).

Splashpads bring many benefits to communities as they are geared toward families and give a much needed alternative to conventional playgrounds and traditional water activities. They are typically free for families to use as most are installed in community or city parks which operate without admission fees, and they are often more attractive than traditional playgrounds as they usually incorporate more color (Smith). A Splashpad is an additional recreational attraction for new businesses and their employees and also for families who might live outside the community in which it is installed. Some of the neighboring communities to Kosciusko County that feature Splashpads are Columbia City, Bourbon, Nappanee, Goshen, Wakarusa, South Bend, and Fort Wayne.

Splashpads are ADA compliant, and a Splashpad experience may have additional physical, psychological, social, and cognitive benefits for children with different types of challenges or disabilities. It has been shown that water activities have calming effects on many children with Autism who experience sensory difficulties (Therapeutic Recreation). In Warsaw, Wawasee, and Tippecanoe Valley Schools there are ninety-six children age 3 to 12 who have been diagnosed on the Autism spectrum. Another fourteen children of preschool and elementary age Kosciusko County have been diagnosed with orthopedic impairments (Blatz, Hite, Meyers), and in January of 2009, seventy-six Kosciusko County children age 0 to 3 were receiving First Step services for developmental delays (Jarvis). Kurt Carlson, Bowen Center CEO,

reports a dramatic increase of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder being diagnosed and treated at Bowen Center (Speaking to KLA). ADHD now affects 5 to 7 percent of children, which means that 1 or 2 children per school classroom may be diagnosed with the disorder (Bowen Center FAQ's). Water play in the safety of a Splashpad environment could be beneficial to most children with challenges or disabilities as they are designed with various types of water activities based on skill, development, and learning. Each Splashpad is designed as a sensory experience for every child, and children with physical, mental, and emotional challenges may especially benefit from its fun, safe water play.

The cost of a Splashpad varies as to its size. The cost of the smaller Splashpad in Bourbon was \$70,000, and the cost of a larger one in Columbia City was \$125,000 (Smith). The initial cost is determined by the pad size, the number of water activities on the Splashpad, and the type of water system used. The cost for concrete is typically \$20 to \$25 per square foot, and the larger and more colorful water activities add to the cost of the Splashpad. There are two types of water systems that can be installed for Splashpads, a recirculation system or a flow through system (Smith).

A recirculation system is much like one installed for a swimming pool. This system requires at least a 3,000 to 4,000 gallon storage tank, which could be larger depending on the size of the Splashpad. It requires that chemicals be added to the water for treatment in order to maintain an acceptable quality of water. Treating the water adds more to the cost as someone must periodically test the water and be responsible for keeping the water at the proper quality, which heightens the level of liability. The upfront cost of the recirculation system can cost from \$50,000 to \$60,000 (Smith).

A flow through system is much simpler. Basically, a flow through system is connected to the city water system. City water is already treated and is of good quality, so no chemicals are required at the Splashpad site. The water comes into the Splashpad through the city water system and drains back into the sewer system. A flow through system has very little upfront costs when compared to a recirculation system as only water and sewer lines are required. However, the ongoing cost of a flow through system depends on how much water is used at the Splashpad and how much is billed for the water use. The cost of water will vary depending on the hours a Splashpad operates and how much water each element uses, and the cost could be a thousand or more dollars per month of operation. Water activities are controlled by hand motion sensors, so the elements only run for a limited time until activated again which saves hundreds of gallons of water, and the Splashpad can also be programmed to turn on and off when desired. Maintenance costs are minimal as a Splashpad with a flow through system takes only about one half hour of labor each for spring start up and fall shut down of the computer system (Smith).

The KLA Splashpad team presented its project to the Warsaw Park Board, and Mr. Bill Smith, Splashpad designer from RecSource, attended the meeting to answer the Board's questions. The Board showed interest by requesting that Mr. Larry Plummer, Park Director and advisor for the Splashpad project, search and report on any suitable park land based on water and sewer availability. On March 18, 2009, Plummer reported to the Park Board regarding the different sites he recommended (Peryam). A taskforce of interested parents and community and business leaders has already been established through this KLA project to move the Splashpad project toward completion. The Park Board has invited the taskforce, when ready, to

ask for permission to build on the land found to be most favorable by both groups. If the proposal is accepted, the land designated, and the size of the Splashpad approved, the taskforce will work with a professional Splashpad designer to refine the design to submit to the Board. The focus of the taskforce will then be raising the amount of money needed to finance the Splashpad through grants from foundations, donations from local businesses and organizations, and contributions from interested friends and families through money gifts and fundraisers. As for the ongoing water expense, Plummer reported at the Park Board meeting on March 18 that he has talked with Indiana American Water about financing the water bill (Peryam). After the payer of the ongoing water costs has been determined and the Splashpad has been built, the responsibility for its operation and maintenance will belong to the Parks Department and Park Board. The taskforce will then be disbanded as its mission will be accomplished.

Splashpads, for the most part, are for users of all age groups and abilities and although each Splashpad features many types of play and activities that require different levels of development and skills, water is still the element of fun. “The intrinsic relationship that children have with water is undeniable. Whether it’s a toddler playing in a puddle, a family running through a lawn sprinkler on a hot summer day, or a group of teens waging a water fight with a garden hose, water is an endless source of play and fascination for children” (Design Guidelines). In 2006, there were over 20,000 children living in Kosciusko County (Kosciusko County). A well designed Splashpad could provide hours of safe water fun to thousands of children and families in our community, and the enjoyment of the water as it is sprayed,

gushed, dumped, and poured from the play activities would continue to please for generations to come.

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Appendix

A. Warsaw Times-Union – Warsaw Parks Board Articles

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