



Missoula REALTORS® Combine Dollars and Sweat Equity to Make All-Abilities Playground Happen – January 2015

Missoula, Montana prides itself on its spectacular mountain setting, and its thriving system of parks and walk-and-bike trails that get citizens and tourists out into the great outdoors. Now, it can also take pride in a state-of-the-art playground for children of all physical abilities that enables those who were once excluded from the fun to enjoy and benefit from Missoula's great natural gifts. It is called Silver Summit: A Playground for Everyone. It's the first playground of its kind in Montana, and it was supported by the Missoula Organization of REALTORS® (MOR).

The all-abilities playground in Missoula's McCormick Park, featuring rubberized surfaces, a sensory play area, and specialized equipment like a wheelchair-accessible merry-go-round, was still in the planning and fundraising stage when the local REALTORS® got involved, with MOR President Brint Wahlberg leading the charge. Having an autistic son, Wahlberg is particularly sensitive to the concept of a community that is inclusive and accessible. As an MOR official, he knows the value such a project brings to the community as a whole. MOR's Chief Executive Officer, Ruth Link, had learned about the Placemaking Grants offered by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® at an Association Executive Institute, and was eager to take advantage of the opportunity. "I had heard examples of helping to create a place with park benches and so on," she says, "but I know of nothing that could truly make a place more definitively than an all-abilities playground. This was something that would make such an immediate positive impact."

MOR received a Placemaking Grant of \$2,000 from NAR, to which it added \$3,000 of its own funds to donate to the Silver Summit playground. Then, MOR learned that another grant had come in with a volunteer requirement, and its members rushed to help -- so many, in fact, that the association had to create a waiting list. On a not-too-hot day in July, about a dozen MOR volunteers worked for three-hour shifts, helping professional contractors drill holes and pour concrete footings. "None of our volunteers had any particular construction skills," says Link, who was on hand with t-shirts, water bottles, and snacks, "but they were given good direction and were really happy they were able to help." The volunteers were so invested, she notes, that they all attended the playground's grand opening in September. "There's been a lot of excitement about the playground, which is in the very heart of the community, and joins a string of wonderful parks along the Clark Fork River," she adds. "Among our members, there's a lot of pride that our association helped to make it a reality."

Winter comes early in Montana, and construction on Phase II of the project, the creation of a broader community gathering place around the Silver Summit playground, has come to a halt, although the weather hasn't stopped the kids from playing. Says Link, "Everyone involved in the project now knows the volunteer power of MOR, and that we'll be ready to help when things get moving again in the spring!"

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Missoula, Montana are putting their funding and their sweat-equity towards making their community more inclusive, contact Ruth Link, Chief Executive Officer of the Missoula Organization of REALTORS®, at rlink@missoularealestate.com or 406-728-0560.



Above: REALTORS[®] Madison Fulcher (left) and Jauna Poindexter (right) volunteer their time and muscles to help build playground supported by NAR Placemaking Grant.

Below: Poindexter and Fulcher give the job a thumbs-up.

