

## Homesteaders playground project seeking GOCO grant

Written by Chris Lee

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Playgrounds and pancakes don't usually appear in the same sentence, but on Friday, Feb. 4 Phillips County and a group of volunteers will do exactly that.

Phillips County Commissioners have teamed up with a group of volunteers to help fund a playground project for Homesteaders Park.

A freewill donation "Sweet Pancake Bonanza" will be held from 7-9 a.m. at Phillips County Event Center Friday, Feb. 4.

The first application for a GOCO (Great Outdoors Colorado) grant fell two spots from the cut-off line, according to Phillips County Administrator Randy Schafer.

The GOCO staff highly encouraged the group to reapply for the grant and focus on two areas that could be improved upon. "We're going to shore up those parts and reapply," Schafer said.

The first area is public input. The evaluation committee would like to see more community support and input in the application. This is a big part of the thinking behind the pancake breakfast.

Event organizers are hoping the turnout will be good since there is no school on Feb. 4.

County commissioners will help serve the breakfast and be on hand to provide information. They, along with volunteers, will answer any questions from the public concerning the proposed playground.

A PowerPoint presentation outlining the project will also be on display.

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“I think it will be fun for people to just come out and enjoy the time,” Schafer said.

Schafer said a survey handed out to the public during the Event Center’s grand opening and thank you celebration saw about a 20 percent return. Of those surveys returned, Schafer said they were all in favor of the playground project. “Not one of them had a negative comment,” he said.

A question posed by the grant review board was, “Why are you building this just for the handicapped kids?”

One thing Schafer stressed is the proposed playground isn’t just for handicapped children or those with disabilities. Anyone and everyone will be able to use the playground equipment. The difference is that handicapped and disabled children will have the opportunity to use the playground because it is made to allow them access to it.

Schafer noted the closest similar playground is located in either Fort Collins or Colorado Springs, so this would be a great addition to northeast Colorado.

The second item the committee suggested needs improvement is more firm match estimates from the public. Schafer encourages those who would like to pledge a donation do so before the March deadline of the grant.

Hopes of the county and volunteers is to see the playground begin to take shape sometime this summer or fall.

Two grants, each in the amount of \$5,000, have already been received. The first came from the Daniel’s Fund and the other from El Pomar. A third grant application sent to Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation was turned down.

Plans for an artificial turf field and nine-hole frisbee golf course are also in the works. Benches,

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additional lighting, pathways and safety fencing will hopefully be partially funded with an Enhancement Grant through the Colorado Department of Transportation, according to Schafer.

The current structure has been in place for around 30 years and is made out of metal and wood. Concern about the metal burning children during the summer and the wood causing injuries and splinters is part of the reasoning behind the proposed playground.

Schafer noted some visitors who parked a camper near the park last summer voiced their concern after letting their children play on the structure.

Volunteer Brooke Dirks said the playground will “complete the Event Center.”

Schafer said both the county and volunteers are enthusiastic and excited to see the project move forward.