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For Immediate Release

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Community Generosity Brings Civic Center Playground to Life

Traverse City – Miracles do happen, according to Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Director Kristine Erickson, who recently managed a challenging crowdfunding campaign for a new playground at the Civic Center.

“We had five weeks, between July 19 and August 31 at midnight, to raise \$50,000 so our department could receive a matching grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority,” said Erickson. “It was a roller-coaster that last week, because most of the funds came in at the last minute!”

As of Friday, August 26, only \$6,000 had been raised for the “Get Out and Play” project. Knowing there were only five days until the deadline for raising funds, Erickson said she tried to accelerate giving by calling everyone she knew and many she did not know. She sent blast e-mails, put posts on Facebook, and reached out to all the area media. By the following Monday, that amount raised had increased by approximately \$24,000 to \$30,000.

With only two days left, Erickson persisted and continued to contact potential donors and post frequently on social media. By the afternoon of August 31, the gap had shrunk to only \$4,000. “We had eight hours to go and, I have to admit, I was a bit worried until a local business owner made the donation that pushed it over the edge.” The business owner told Erickson he had just heard about the project, the deadline for the match, and that funds were still needed, so he instructed his staff to “make whatever donation it takes to close the gap.” Erickson said she and her staff cheered when the website showed the \$50,000 goal was reached at 4 p.m. “We couldn’t believe it,” she said. “What big-heartedness from him and everyone who donated!”

Estimated cost for the project is \$150,000, with \$130,000 of that amount for a structure, and \$20,000 for a maintenance fund. Parks and Recreation already had raised one third of the funds from previous donations and wellness grants. Now that amount, plus the \$100,000 raised by the community and the MEDC match, equals \$152,000 total in available funds for the project. “Or so we thought,” said Erickson.

One week after on-line fundraising ended, the project received yet another large donation, which has increased the total in available funds to nearly \$183,000, and, according to Erickson, “makes it possible for the play area to be even more ADA accessible.”

Traverse City residents Meridith and Dan Falconer, made an initial \$40,000 donation at the end of 2015 to kick off the playground project. During the on-line fundraising period, they pledged \$10,000 more. On September 7, the Falconers made a third pledge of \$30,000. In return for the donations, which total \$80,000 the couple requested naming rights for the playground from the county Parks and Recreation Commission.

On September 15, county Parks and Recreation commissioners approved entering into a naming rights agreement with the Falconers. The agreement is for the structure to be called the "Campbell Community Playground," in memory of Bruce Campbell Falconer, Dan Falconer's father and a Traverse City community leader who passed away in 2015.

"Our community owes a debt of gratitude to the Falconers and to the many other local and even out-of-town families, individuals, couples, organizations, and businesses that donated to the Get Out and Play Project. It was an outpouring I was proud to witness, and one that will bring a tremendous asset to our community," said Erickson.

Why did the Falconers choose to back this project? According to Meridith Falconer, "The Civic Center is a truly unique community facility, from the track and outdoor fields to the indoor pool and ice rink, there are benefits for all ages. We are fortunate to be able to support the ongoing growth of a Traverse City cornerstone, and look forward to the finished product!"

Erickson would like the playground to be built by mid-October 2016, but there is no firm date yet. Next steps are to arrange for excavation of the 150-by-70-foot site, order materials on the "build list," and schedule the two-day community build. The Parks Director is hopeful that a local excavation business would be willing to donate time and equipment to clear the site in return for recognition on the donor board. Once excavation dates are set, Erickson will schedule the two-day build and invite the community so that volunteers can sign up to help. The Parks Department also is seeking assistance from an organization or business to donate materials required for the community build.

For more information about the Get Out and Play Civic Center playground project and to view the design, visit www.patronicity/getoutandplayproject.com, or check out Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation's Facebook page. To discuss donating services and materials, or to volunteer time, please call County Parks and Recreation at 231-922-4818.

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