

Outdoor upgrades turn Bijou into destination play area

By Kathryn Reed

Scrambling onto rocks, rolling around in grass, throwing a Frisbee, sitting at tables with friends, watching trees blow in the gentle wind. Life at Bijou Community School is a whole lot different now.

Dirt, and more often mud, is what the South Tahoe elementary school students played in. Not anymore.



First-graders Aidan Anton and Martin Valdez play on one of the new boulders at Bijou Community School.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

With the force and determination of parent Kathy Haven behind the project, she corralled the necessary people, businesses and officials to make this a reality.

The nearly two-year project culminated June 9 with students

patiently gathered on the blacktop listening to all the adults talk before they were allowed to run to the grassy field.

As a bit of a test, they were given treats, with the lesson being – use the bear boxes for the trash. With no plastic wrappers visible by the time they headed back to their classrooms Thursday afternoon, these Tahoe kids understand about not creating garbage bears.

Principal Karen Tinlin expects fewer students will be in her office with scraped knees and elbows now that they have a softer surface to play on.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater said practically the first day on the job six years ago Tinlin was complaining about the dirt in the back of the school.

Dale Rise was a bit overwhelmed looking over how this dirt field he grew up next to is now a showcase of sorts. His construction company donated significantly to the project.

The school district came up with half of the \$50,000 expense through Measure G bond dollars, while the community came through with the rest. Big George Ventures, Tahoe Asphalt, Heavenly Mountain Resort, Tahoe Sand and Gravel, Barton Health Foundation, Bijou PTA, Adams Concrete Design, Dale Rise Construction, Signs of Tahoe, Tahoe Bear Box Co., De Celle Memorial Tahoe Relay, Ed Cook Tree Service, Aspen Hollow, Western Turf, Earth and Stone Landscaping, Fuller Construction and Cafecitos either gave cash, supplies or reduced their prices to make this a reality.

“It has been amazing how our community has contributed. For example, when I called Tahoe Asphalt about their big boulder sale, they asked how many we needed. When I said about 40, they came back with ‘we’ll just give them to you’,” Haven said. “It was amazing.”

Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe was another huge component of

getting this project completed. They along with parents and other volunteers like the entire Tahoe Derby Dames team finished putting everything in on June 4 – in the rain.

Twenty-three trees have been planted – mostly aspens and red maple. Five came last year, and seven more are on order.

Not all of the 12 picnic tables have been installed. Some hardware needs to arrive. One table is ADA compliant.

“I’m very happy to see this park for the community,” special education teacher Charna Silver said. “The fact that it’s attached to our school is a bonus.”

This is the only park between Rufus Allen Boulevard and Stateline.

The soccer-size field could be used in the summer for tournaments.

Between the blacktop and the field are the play structures. Haven’s next goal is to have exercise stations on the far corners of the field.

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