

The Times

Playground project passes 'go' and collects \$3,000 at fundraiser - Page 2

HOPEWELL -- At its fundraiser yesterday, the Hopewell Playground Project hoped to raise something more than just Monopoly money.

Children and adults met at Hopewell Elementary School to compete in an officially sanctioned Monopoly tournament, all in an effort to raise money to construct two playgrounds in town.

The playgrounds are planned for Gazebo Park and the township's historic train station (a stop that won't be found on the Short Line, B&O, Reading or Pennsylvania lines).

We're hoping to raise about \$3,000 between the participants and the sponsors," Michelle Brennan, general coordinator of the project, said. "Various businesses and individuals have sponsored a piece of property on the board, and for that they receive recognition at our event. They will also receive a hand-painted tile that will be featured at Gazebo Park."

The project has partnered with the Potter's Alley pottery store in Pennington to provide tiles for the playground to honor the project's donors.

"All of the tiles, as well as the donor board, will be displayed on the wall at Gazebo Park," Brennan added.

Since its inception last spring, the project has raised \$54,000. "Our goal is \$109,000," Brennan said. The project coordinators expect the playgrounds to go up between June 17 and 21, and they hope to solicit community participation in Build Week, with Hopewell residents coming together to take part in the construction.

"We are also looking for tools and materials to be donated," Brennan added. "This is a true community project, from fundraising and designing, to building and tools, for everything to be donated."

The playgrounds were designed by the Ithaca, N.Y., architectural firm Leathers & Associates, a company that has been deeply involved in designing community playgrounds across the country.

"They have most of their success in small towns, because people come together to make it happen," Brennan said.

The Monopoly fundraiser was the brainchild of Todd Poole, Hopewell resident and fundraising coordinator for the project. As a resident of New Brunswick, Poole ran Monopoly fundraisers for the city's Children's Cancer Institute.

The tournament featured four qualifying rounds and a championship round, all on boards donated by Hasbro, the parent company of the game's publisher, Parker-Brothers. With the field thinned to four wheeler-dealers, the championship round commenced just before noon.

"There's clearly a strategy in learning how to play the game," Poole said.

Bearing that in mind, the contenders for the championship were assembled piecemeal from different age groups and backgrounds.

Representing the lower end of the age spectrum were cousins Alex Young of Solebury, Pa., and Zoe Mirabella of Holland Township, both 9 years old. Representing the adult crowd were Hopewell natives Kathy Dallessio, the editor of a medical magazine, and Sandy Brown, an honest-to-goodness real estate developer.

Brown was quick to downplay any competitive edge one might think this gave her. "It's not helping me out today," she said.

In fact, it was Young who dominated in his qualifying round, bankrupting his field of competitors in less than an hour.

"I've been playing since I was 5 years old," Emily Lukacs, an employee at PNC Bank in Hopewell, said. "But I got stomped today."

With prizes ranging from a four-pack of games at Pine Creek Miniature Golf and a massage from Hopewell's Art of Massage studio, plus a slew of classic Parker-Brothers games, on the line, the competition was stiff in the championship round.

"We're very serious," Brown said. "It's a serious game."

The winner of the day's officially sanctioned competition was eligible to participate in the Monopoly National Championships in Washington, D.C., in April. The winner of the national competition would move forward to the Monopoly World Championship in Las Vegas in October.

Poole, who has never competed himself in one of the many tournaments he has organized, said the national and world championships are only held every two or three years, depending on the number of regional tournaments held.

Dallessio won the game after an hour and a half when time was called, eking out a victory over the real-life real estate broker Brown.

In the end, though, it was the Hopewell Playground Project that landed on Free Parking, taking it closer to its fundraising goal.

"It feels good helping on a community I'm now a part of," Lukacs said.

The Monopoly game is licensed in more than 80 countries and printed in more than 26 languages. Since it first went on the market in 1935, more than 200 million Monopoly games have been sold worldwide.

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