

Families flock to Natural Play Hill in Moorhead on opening day

The Rotary Play Hill and Bike Park opened to the public with a Thursday, June 20, grand opening.



Kids get their first chance to play on the new Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park in Moorhead after a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday, June 20, 2024. Chris Flynn / The Forum

By [Ingrid Harbo](#) and [Kjersti Maday](#)

June 20, 2024 at 4:39 PM

MOORHEAD — Ten-year-old Oliver McManus has an appeal to parents: Let kids be more independent.

At the Thursday, June 20, grand opening for Moorhead’s newest playground, the Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park, McManus shared stories of neighborhood games of tag where the kids made the rules.

“The key to all of this was there were no parents or no adults interfering with everything,” he said.

He hopes the new playground will be another space for children to play independently.

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“We want kids to play their own way,” McManus said. “Who says you have to climb the net with your hands? Why can’t you climb it with your feet?”

Shortly after McManus' speech, dozens of kids got a taste of independence as they rushed to the towering wooden playground.



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The playground and bike park was five years in the making. The project was planned and executed by the five Fargo-Moorhead Rotary Clubs and the Fargo-Moorhead Rotary Foundation. At the grand opening, the Rotary Foundation handed it over to the city of Moorhead, which will be responsible for maintaining the playground.

Playground equipment includes a 26-foot-high tree house, rope bridge and zip line. Around the tree house are log and boulder play areas, nets to climb and balance beams. A bike park to the side of the playground has wooden decks and ramps.



Kids explore the new Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park in Riverfront Park in Moorhead on Thursday, June 20, 2024. Chris Flynn / The Forum

The playground in Riverfront Park overlooks the Red River and the bike trail that runs by the river.

Heather Ranck, the Rotary member who led the project, was among parents and other community members watching from a distance as the playground opened to the public for the first time.

“It’s the picture I had in my mind before we did this project,” Ranck said. “Look at the line to get on the zip line.”



A zip line is one of the key features of the newly opened Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park in Moorhead. Chris Flynn / The Forum

In her remarks before the playground opened, Ranck thanked other organizations and donors who helped fund the project. In total, the playground and bike park cost \$1.27 million. More than 300 people and organizations donated around \$1.1 million for the project.

To finish paying for the playground, the Rotary Foundation needs to raise an additional \$60,000, Ranck said.



A child explores the sliding pole at the new Rotary Natural Play Hill and Bike Park in Riverfront Park in Moorhead opened Thursday, June 20, 2024. Chris Flynn / The Forum

The Rotary Natural Play Hill is the second playground to open in Moorhead this year. On June 7, Moorhead celebrated a new [inclusive playground at Southside Regional Park](#).

Moorhead Mayor Shelly Carlson said the new parks bring people outside.

"We are building places for a community to organically grow," she said.



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