



MEDIA RELEASE

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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

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Warriors' Path State Park Celebrates Grand Opening of New Palmer Center Amphitheater; Commemorates Tennessee State Parks 75th Anniversary

KINGSPORT, Tenn. - Warriors' Path State Park joined the Friends of Warriors' Path and a number of special guests today for the grand opening of the Palmer Center Foundation Amphitheater - the newest addition to the Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground, which is part of the state park.

Made possible by The Palmer Center Foundation, the amphitheater is the final phase of the all-accessible playground complex, which serves as the only one of its kind in the U.S.

Designed by The Moore Group Architects, under the leadership of Tony Moore, the amphitheater was built using the existing hillside and natural basin with terrace seating made of segmented blocks. The grassy aisles and surrounding area allow the new outdoor facility to host audiences from 200 to more than 1,000. The dual-level stage area is approximately 900 square feet and is designed for both intimate lecture-type programming for smaller groups and full-stage productions for much larger audiences. J.A. Street served as the project contractor.

The facility is equipped with electrical capacity to serve the needs of various uses. Like the rest of the complex, the amphitheater - both stage and seating areas - are fully accessible. The amphitheater is available for many purposes, including educational programs, lectures, concerts and weddings. Reservations may be made by contacting Warriors' Path State Park at (423) 239-8531.

"On behalf of the Palmer Center Foundation, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of the volunteers involved in this project," said Dr. Linda Story, president of the Palmer Center Foundation Board of Directors.

"Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park is an asset to our community and leaves a lasting legacy that can be enjoyed for years by children of all abilities. We are thrilled to be able to assist with the funding of Phase 4 of this initiative, the amphitheater."

Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground opened at Warriors' Path in April 2007 and was made possible through public-private partnerships. Warriors' Path is the first state park in the nation to provide a Boundless Playground for visitors. The playground is supported by the Friends of Warriors' Path, an organization that fosters conservation and educational efforts, while assisting the park in its efforts to better preserve and protect its existing facilities and resources.

"This playground complex has already attracted thousands of visitors and national attention for our state park system," said Deputy Commissioner Brock Hill, Tennessee State Parks. "It's easy to visualize children and adults of all abilities enjoying this beautiful amphitheater for years to come. I sincerely applaud the network of businesses, civic clubs, churches and individuals who have made this possible. I want to especially thank Dr. Story and the Palmer Center Foundation, along with our great Warriors' Path Friends group for their dedication toward this project."

Planning for the Boundless Playground Complex began in 2001 by the Friends of Warriors' Path State Park organization, led at that time by the late Darrell Rice, an active community volunteer. Supported by a growing group of individual and group volunteers and generously sponsored by many local businesses and civic clubs, the complex - named in memory of Rice - now includes play equipment and play areas designed for specific age and development groups, the Lions of Narnia™ Braille Trail, and the fully-accessible Anderson Treehouse.

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"This has truly been a labor of love that has stretched out over 11 years," said Betty DeVinney, president of the Friends group and chair of the Darrell's Dream project. "The community support for this complex has been tremendous, and we all hold Darrell and his dream in our hearts as both the originator of the Friends group and the concept for this wonderful playground complex."

Today's grand opening of the amphitheater coincides with Tennessee State Parks' 75th Anniversary, adding significance to the event.

The Tennessee State Parks system was established through legislation in 1937, and those laws - with modifications and additions over the years - remain the framework for park operations today. As in most states, Tennessee began in cooperation with federal programs that instigated individual parks. Later, Depression era recovery programs gave a boost to the idea and the possibility of creating parks. The Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration worked on land conservation, but also delved further into the actual planning and construction of what would become the first of 53 Tennessee State Parks.

Today, there is a state park within an hour's drive of just about anywhere in Tennessee. A 2009 University of Tennessee study highlights the positive economic impacts that state parks provide local communities, particularly in rural areas of the state. The study found that for every dollar spent on trips to Tennessee State Parks, an additional \$1.11 of economic activity was generated throughout the state. When the direct and indirect expenditures were combined, the impact of Tennessee State Parks to the state's economy was \$1.5 billion in total industry output, supporting more than 18,600 jobs.

"Our vision statement highlights the inherent value of our natural environment, along with the value of the many physical reminders of Tennessee's past," added Deputy Commissioner Hill. "Tennessee's state parks have played such an important role in our history, and they play a critical role in our health and quality of life, which will benefit Tennesseans well into the future. There's no better example of that role than what has been accomplished here at Warriors' Path and what Darrell's Dream brings to this community."

Tennessee's 53 state parks and 82 state natural areas offer diverse natural, recreational and cultural experiences for individuals, families or business and professional groups. State park features range from pristine natural areas to 18-hole championship golf courses. For a free brochure about Tennessee State Parks, call toll free at 1-888-867-2757. For upcoming events in connection with the 75th Anniversary of Tennessee State Parks, please visit the state parks website at www.tnstateparks.com.

Warriors' Path State Park sits on 950 acres and was named for the park's proximity to the ancient war and trading path used by the Cherokee. The park is situated on the shores of TVA's Patrick Henry Reservoir on the Holston River. It features camping, hiking, fishing, golf, boating, biking, swimming, picnic facilities and horseback riding.

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About the Palmer Center Foundation

The Palmer Center Foundation is organized exclusively for charitable purposes to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia by awarding grants and scholarships to meet individual, group, and/or community needs. The media contact for the Palmer Center Foundation is Amy Greear, who can be reached at (423) 378-3409 (ext. 12) or at amy.greear@gmail.com.

About Friends of Warriors' Path State Park

The Friends of Warriors' Path State Park is an organization that fosters conservation and educational efforts and assists the park staff in its efforts to better preserve and protect its existing facilities and resources. The group also supports the park staff in its work to provide quality recreational and interpretive experiences. This includes, but is not limited to, many natural, cultural and scenic features. For more information, contact the park. The media contact for the Friends of Warriors' Path State Park is Martha Lawson, who can be reached at (423) 863-8871 or at lawson1@chartertn.net.