



490 Hemlock Road, P.O. Box 6164  
Kingsport, TN 37663

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Contacts: Betty DeVinney  
[bdevinney@charter.net](mailto:bdevinney@charter.net)  
(423) 967-2381

Mary Steadman  
[mesteadman@aol.com](mailto:mesteadman@aol.com)  
(423) 956-4330

## **ACCESSIBLE TREEHOUSE GRAND OPENING EVENT**

*A First for a State Park in the U.S.*

KINGSPORT, Tenn. - A new addition will be celebrated at 1 p.m. Thursday, May 27, 2010, at the Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park – a treehouse accessible to kids of all abilities. The Anderson Treehouse at Warriors' Path State Park is the first accessible treehouse in a state park in the United States.

Named for benefactors Sam and DeLois Anderson, the Anderson Treehouse is the first treehouse built in connection with a Boundless Playground and Braille Trail and provides all children with the chance to play among the treetops, including those who have impaired sight or mobility.

“Since Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground first opened two years ago, this unique play area has attracted thousands of visitors to Warriors' Path State Park,” said Commissioner Jim Fyke, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. “This Boundless Playground is a tribute to public-private partnerships, and I congratulate the many people in the Tri-Cities area who worked so hard to create a place where children of all abilities can play together.”

The ADA-compliant treehouse features a winding walkway that can be walked or navigated by wheelchair. Once kids reach the top, they can get a close-up view of birds and other critters in the trees through binoculars in the treehouse, or they can use the binoculars to look out over the rest of the playground and other areas of the park.

“This entire project is a wonderful gift from the heart of this community to all of the children who will visit and enjoy the freedom to play,” said Commissioner Susan Whitaker, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. “It is truly a community best.”

But the playground is more than just an outlet for kids and their seemingly endless energy. It's a place where they can learn about trees, flowers, animals and birds – even insects. “Through hands-on, interactive exhibits, kids, including the blind and sight-impaired, can learn how to identify trees, plants and flowers,” said Mary Steadman, Friends of Warriors' Path State Park. “They can also find out how to identify frogs and birds by their ‘songs,’ feel the holes made in a tree by woodpeckers, and learn about the lifecycles of amphibians. All of this combined makes for a well-rounded learning experience that is also fun for the kids.”

The design of the treehouse used locally harvested oak and hickory trees, as well as locally sawn pine for structural and decorative elements. The hardware used in creating the structure does not harm the living trees in which the treehouse sits.

In addition to the Anderson Family, other major sponsors who have contributed to the Anderson Treehouse are J.A. Street and Associates, Essyx Exhibits and Displays, Express Signs, and countless volunteers such as the Lions Club of Kingsport and TheMooreGroup Architects/Planners, who have contributed to the planning and development of what you see today.

Betty DeVinney, who has chaired the Darrell's Dream playground project on behalf of the Friends of Warriors' Path State Park, said she's grateful to the many companies, civic organizations and individuals who have made the original playground, the Lions Narnia Braille Trail and this new phase a reality. "One of the great things about our community is the way many people get behind an idea and stick with it," DeVinney said. "Darrell's Dream is a great example of that. The number of monetary contributors and volunteers who have provided gifts-in-kind, plus their own time and expertise, is remarkable. Those of us who knew Darrell Rice—for whom the playground is named—realize how honored he would be to be remembered in a way that truly enhances our community."

Also at the Treehouse Grand Opening event, Friends of Warriors' Path State Park will announce the addition of the Palmer Center Foundation Amphitheater. "We continue to be excited about our future plans for Darrell's Dream," Steadman said. "With the financial assistance of The Palmer Center Foundation, a fully accessible amphitheater on this site will open this fall, fulfilling yet another dream for the children of the Tri-Cities."

CenturyLink will also announce its plans to provide high-speed Internet for the playground. "CenturyLink is pleased to partner with Boundless Playground as the broadband provider, which means once work is completed, park visitors, including educators conducting classes, will have access to high-speed wireless Internet," said CenturyLink Vice President Lottie Ryans, whose office and home are in Johnson City. "We see this as one of the many targeted innovative ways we are looking to support the Tri-Cities market from a philanthropic standpoint. The educational aspect of the Boundless Playground fits perfectly with CenturyLink's philanthropic focus on education. Further, the Boundless Playground's purpose of providing access to all people, even physically challenged, tiers to CenturyLink's Unifying Principles that all people are to be treated with fairness and dignity and respect. We at CenturyLink are proud to be part of making Darryl's Dream come true."

Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground opened at Warriors' Path State Park in April 2007 and is associated with the National Center for Boundless Playgrounds, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping communities create extraordinary playgrounds for children with and without disabilities.

### **About Forever Young Treehouses**

Forever Young Treehouses promotes the construction of treehouses that are universally accessible. While accessible treehouses provide a memorable experience for everyone, the company focuses on facilitating treehouse construction for children and young adults with special needs who are routinely confronted with barriers to fun and play in their daily lives. An accessible treehouse removes these obstacles, bringing people of all abilities together and closer to nature. Forever Young Treehouses also uses building methods that protect the health of trees.

### **About Friends of Warriors' Path State Park**

The Friends of Warriors' Path 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 their work to provide quality recreational and interpretive experiences. This includes, but is not limited to, many natural, cultural and scenic features.

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