

Come Out and Play

Bismarck Named a “Playful City USA” Community

In a time when 82 percent of parents believe children don't spend enough time playing outside, a select number of communities across the nation have taken innovative approaches to make play a priority for the health and well-being of their kids. Communities large and small, urban and rural, have created initiatives designed to increase the quantity and quality of play and playgrounds, while improving access to existing play opportunities.

To honor communities making this commitment to play, KaBOOM!, a national non-profit dedicated to bringing play back into children's lives, named Bismarck a Playful City USA community in 2009 and again in 2010. Bismarck has created and implemented programs to positively impact childhood wellness, public safety and the quality of life.

Steven M. Neu, Director, Bismarck Parks and Recreation District, said, “Not only are there diverse recreational programs for kids throughout the park district, but access to parks, trails and playgrounds for free and unstructured play is a standard we've set, and now, have been honored for it. “

The application for “Playful City USA” also had the support of the City of Bismarck. “We've always known Bismarck as a great place to live, work and play. This designation puts the stamp of approval on *play*, said Mayor John Warford.

Other “Playful City USA” communities across the country include Phoenix, AZ, Niagara Falls, NY and Missoula, MT. Bismarck is the only city in North Dakota to receive the honor.

In celebration of being a “Playful City USA,” the City of Bismarck and Bismarck Parks and Recreation District has designated an annual **Play Day in Bismarck** each summer. In 2009, all BPRD Activity Centers participated in a Play-Off, where all 600 participants were encouraged to wear red and to all go outside and play on the playgrounds of Bismarck from 10-11 am that day. In addition to Activity Center participants, all kids throughout the city of Bismarck were invited to wear red and go outside and play in the yard, in the neighborhood or nearest park or playground from 10-11 am.

Additionally, the entire community, both in 2009 and 2010, were invited to the Bismarck Community Bowl from 4-8 pm for a complete Play-For-All. Families could walk, skip or run around the track, play catch in the football field, draw a picture, kick a ball into a soccer goal or just enjoy unstructured play with the variety of toys and games that were provided. It was an evening to simply, *play*.

In 2009 and 2010, Play Day also kicked off a Playground Passport program. The many new playgrounds throughout the community's park system should be discovered and enjoyed, and the Playground Passport allowed families to explore the playgrounds on their own time, at their own pace, and asked questions about each playground. Answers were then recorded in each individual passport. The passports were then brought to the BPRD office by a certain date to be checked, and participants received a passport prize and a t-shirt.

Play Day events are part of BPRD's annual July Celebration, noting that July is National Parks and Recreation month.

KaBOOM! selected Bismarck as a “Playful City USA” for its dedication to play. The KaBOOM! vision is to have a great place to play within walking distance of every child. Playful City USA communities create best practices, like the ones mentioned above, to reach a similar goal.

“Our country is facing two monumental deficits: a lack of unstructured play among children and a lack of resources to address this very issue,” said Darell Hammond, KaBOOM! CEO and Co-founder. “Bismarck took a stand and determined that the future of their community—their children—deserve a commitment to the cause of play. This is an investment in the future, not an expenditure and cities and towns across the country can replicate initiatives from these Playful City USA communities so that they too can bring play back into the lives of their children.”

For more information on Play Day or other July Celebration events, and to watch for Play Day 2011, please go to www.bisparks.org, or call 222-6455.