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## Broad smiles greet Brook Street Park reopening in Lafayette

By Sharon K. Sobotta



City staff, commissioners and council members at Brook Street Park on April 18. Photo Sharon Sobotta

As the mother of two toddlers and a Lafayette Elementary School kindergartener, Zinab Lagab couldn't be more thrilled that Brook Street Park is officially open and ready for play.

Lagab moved from Oakland to Lafayette because she thought it would be a great place for her children to go to school. "When we got here two years ago, this park was just wood chips and we're so excited that the park is officially opening," Lagab says while attending the ribbon cutting ceremony of the reimagined airport themed park on April 18. Lagab lives in an apartment complex on the east side of town, about a 10-minute walk from the park. Like many in the city, Lagab longed for an outdoor space to bring her kids during the pandemic. "I was wondering where are all the parks in Lafayette," she says with a bright smile. "And now, it's here. We're so excited to play."

Lagab's son, 3-year-old Adam, says he's excited about everything at the park, especially the airplane. Why? "Because I love to play and I love to fly."

More than four dozen people of all backgrounds and ages gathered to celebrate the reopening of Brook Street Park, which had been reduced to just tan bark after the broken down pirate-themed play equipment was removed just before the pandemic. Parents, residents, nannies, grandparents and children of all ages expressed how much they noticed the absence of a park during the long stint of sheltering in place most of last academic year.

Lauren Herpich, a member of the Parks, Trails and Rec Commission, says the arrival of a downtown park that is accessible to all ages, abilities and income levels has been a long time coming in the city of Lafayette. She recalls joining the commission because there was just one baby swing in all of Lafayette, which was at the community center. "There was nowhere for a young mother, a nanny or a babysitter to take their kid and swing (in downtown Lafayette) and now we have four," Herpich says. "Just to see a family swinging together and hearing children's laughter makes four long years worth it."

Herpich's own child, Connor, appreciates the park and even helped with the ribbon cutting, but Herpich believes the park is vital for all children in the community, especially those in dense housing units. "People don't realize how many people don't have backyards. We have a lot of people who live in apartment buildings who do not have places for their kids to go outside and play. That made the last two years really hard. I hope this rectifies that."

As a longtime Lafayette resident and the parent of a toddler and a first-grader, Robbie Peacock says he's relieved that the park has reopened. "During the pandemic it was a lot of sitting inside trying to find something to do so they didn't drive me crazy. It's a place to come and play and burn off energy," Peacock says. "Jack runs into a lot of his friends from LES here. Oliver is making friends. It's great because everybody gets to hang out. Even parents get a chance to talk to each other."

Scott Tanenbaum, a retired educator, might have outgrown the playground decades ago, but he says he'll never outgrow the park. He and his 13-year-old golden retriever, Katie, often take in the morning excitement as families rush their children to school. "This is a place that gets people out of their homes so they can see who their neighbors are."

Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan helped cut the ribbon for the park's official opening. For Bauer-Kahan, investing in parks is a way to invest in healthy, accessible and inclusive communities. "It's so important to give kids a place to play together to move their bodies, play and learn to work together, to use their imaginations and to become the kind of adults we hope they can grow into," Bauer-Kahan says. And parks that are accessible to people of all ability levels and centrally located do play an important role in building inclusive communities that are environmentally friendly. "It's critical that we have parks in communities that people can walk to."

Jay Lifson from the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce has many fond memories of the park when it had a pirate theme and was also known as the Pirate Park. Even though his grandson has outgrown the park, Lifson says he's happy to see the new iteration of the park - Airport Park - come to life. "We needed this

park in the downtown area so badly," Lifson says. "They've done a beautiful job laying it out and it will be a great place for years to come."



Zinab Lagab celebrates the Lafayette airport-themed Brook Street Park with her children. Photo Sharon Sobotta

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