

NEWARK THIS WEEK

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Young and old mingle in new park

BY BARRY CARTER
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On one half of the lot, there is a sandbox, a swing set, a merry-go-round and several jungle gyms for their preschool-age legs to crawl upon.

On the other half, senior citizens can sit on benches at tables with umbrellas, set among shrubbery and watch the youths play unencumbered. To look at it, one would not think that two lots, once filled with debris and an abandoned fire-damaged drug house could be transformed into a site that now has an inter-generational use.

The Newark Day Center, the oldest nonprofit organization in New Jersey, celebrated the completion of the playground, hidden from view off of Washington and Hill streets.

"When you walk in you don't expect to see all of this," said Trish Morris Yamba, executive director of the center. "The kids love it." The playground was part of the center's five-year strategic plan to provide green space for the preschool-age children, because the center had outgrown the play area on the roof of its building about 10 years ago.

Patricia Milley, a member with the National Executive Service Corp., an organization of retired executives who volunteer time to work with nonprofit groups, helped the board of trustees develop its strategic plan. The city of Newark pitched in selling the two lots to the organization for \$100



Five-year-old Sekayi McMillan plays on the high bars while her teacher, Mary Marcantino, spots her at the Newark Day Center's new playground.

PHOTOS BY MA SONG/THE STAR-LEDGER

"This is the first time that I've seen the children in the playground," Milley said. "This was an empty lot with a lot of trash and the other lot was a crack house. Now it's a playground. It's much nicer than I envisioned it. It turned out so beautiful. People worked so hard."

Even Newark Mayor Sharpe James lent a hand to assemble the playground with numerous volunteers. "It's amazing what can be done with your enthusiasm and energy," James said. "I commend Trish Morris and the board. They saw a need for the youths to have this outlet. They had the insight where youth and senior citizens can come together to share stories."



Robert Gilmore, 5, tries out one of the new swings.

Volunteers and supporters of fit children and the seniors. The program were taken aback at how the space was utilized to bene-

fit children and the seniors. "I didn't know there was this much space back here," said Paula

Bunyan, director of Essex County College Child Development Center.

Roslyn Edgerton, a volunteer and Newark resident, said the playground was beautiful and her 2-year-old niece, Anya Mitchell, took a liking to its sandbox. "I saw it when it was nothing," Edgerton said. "To see it like this is just wonderful."

The Newark Day Center, founded 200 years ago, offers a variety of programs for the community in addition to childcare for children from three months to first grade. The multi-service agency also offers employment and training, lunch and activities for senior citizens, and the well-known Fresh Air fund.

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