

Chili Cook Off benefits playground

By Stephanie M. Mangino
The Winchester Star
March 19, 2010

Middletown — The playground equipment at the Middletown Park on Senseny Avenue hasn't aged well.

Eyelets on swing chains have rusted. The merry-go-round doesn't have a governor needed to regulate speed. And the exercise system doesn't work well for young children.

For almost a year, a committee has worked to upgrade the equipment to conform with American Society for Testing and Materials standards and have Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility.



Middletown Mayor Marshall "Mark" Brown (left) meets with Thom Bailey to look over the playground equipment in the town's park. The equipment should be replaced and updated. Bailey is president of the United Methodist Men at Grace United Methodist Church, which is holding the Chili Cook Off Saturday with the Middletown Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company to raise money for the cause. (Photo by Rick Foster)

The project languished a bit until Thom Bailey, who lives near the park, in January became president of the Grace United Methodist Church men's group. He wanted to mount a community event, and his wife knew Tammy Mason, who has led the playground charge.

So when the idea emerged to have the town's first Chili Cook Off in conjunction with the Middletown Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company, the playground project became the beneficiary, to Mason's delight.

The Chili Cook Off will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the fire company's parking lot at 7855 Main St.

The estimated cost to replace some equipment, upgrade other pieces, and put down additional ground covering is \$50,000.

"That would get us some good equipment," Mason said.

Even in the current economy, she believes the money eventually can be raised.

Mason, 28, is the mother of 6-year-old Sam and 3-year-old Leah. She and husband Craig moved from Wisconsin to their Long Meadows Lane home outside the town limits about four years ago.

Back in the “quote-unquote . . . good old days,” communities worked together to support projects, Bailey said.

The changes are necessary, according to Mason, who discovered with some research that “it’s really play at your own risk down there.”

Mayor Marshall J. “Mark” Brown said he doubts that the government, in this tight economy, will have any money to offer this year.

“We’re going to have to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, so to speak,” said Bailey, 48.

The Chili Cook Off already involves two community groups — the church and the fire company — and some firms, such as Kohl’s and DuPont, have pledged to help.



Middletown Mayor Marshall J. “Mark” Brown looks over a merry-go-round in the town park, part of the equipment that may be replaced or updated.

About a dozen people and groups have registered to make chili. The cooking will begin at 7:30 a.m. and continue until 11:30 a.m.

The response from the public has been “pretty warm” so far, Bailey said, with \$400 to \$600 worth of door prizes donated.

The judges will include Brown, who enjoys chili, even though his body doesn’t respond well to spicy food. “I’m bringing my Tums,” he said with a smile.

Each chili pot will feature a chili pepper rating of 1 to 5, Bailey said, to warn people about the heat they may encounter. For \$5, visitors can eat all the chili they want. Dessert will also be available, and an antacid station will be set up. Also, the fire company’s auxiliary will have hot dog stand.

Children’s activities will be part of the day, too.

Awards will be given in three categories, for best firehouse chili, business/restaurant chili, and hometown cook.

Mason will be out there making chili, using her firefighter husband’s method.

Since it is the first year for the Cook Off, Brown said concerns have been raised about the potential turnout.

But as Bailey said, “it’s got to start somewhere.”

Local leaders hope the event's location, along Main Street (U.S. 11), will draw chili fans, Brown said.

“If you're driving by, just pull in.”

www.middletonfire.com/Chili.htm

— Contact S.M. Mangino at smangino@winchesterstar.com

Article: <http://www.winchesterstar.com/pages/view/chili.html>