

Playground taps donation paydirt

By Lanz Christian Bañes/*Times-Herald* staff writer
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Organizers of the impending City Park playground build-out received a check for \$3,000 Thursday from Touro University.

"It's really neat to be on the other side of (the process)," said Amanda Morris, who presented the check to the two chairpersons of the City Park Committee of the Vallejo Architectural Heritage Foundation.

Morris, a first-year pharmacy student at Touro and a Benicia resident, was part of the build process 15 years ago that gave Benicia its own playground at its City Park. She was 8 years old.

Now she and fellow student Sheree Neilson and professor Dr. Aglaia Panos hope to get the entire university involved with the process.

Touro's \$3,000 goes a long way in helping the City Park Committee close a \$20,000 budget gap, said Adrienne Waterman, committee co-chairperson.

The two-year project calls for an ambitious five-day community build of a playground at Vallejo's historic City Park, bounded by Sacramento, Alabama, Marin and Louisiana streets.

The build dates will be from April 29 to May 3 and hundreds of volunteers are needed for the playground to be finished on schedule.

The playground was designed by a group of more than 200 Vallejo students.

Richard Leathers and Associates, an Ithaca, N.Y.-based architectural firm that specializes in large-scale community builds, worked on the project. The firm previously designed the playground at Benicia City Park of which Morris was a part.

Touro's \$3,000 will go to building the tree fort section of the playground, which features a variety of child-imagined sections, including a sandbox, a ship and several slides.

The committee already has raised about \$15,000 and received \$75,000 in a federal community development block grant.

An estimated \$15,000 gap remains, Waterman said.

Students at Touro will continue to raise funds and hope to sponsor more parts of the playground, such as the handicap accessibility ramps, Morris said.

Additionally, the work requires tools that Waterman and the committee hope the community will allow the volunteers to borrow.

All tools will be returned in the same condition or better, and broken tools will be replaced, Waterman said. Volunteers will be fed breakfast, lunch and dinner, and there will be a daycare site for children too young to participate (younger than 10 years old), Waterman said.

Because volunteers will be fed breakfast, lunch and dinner, any food donations are also welcome.

As the last five weeks of the project draw to a close, the committee is scrambling to finish up the details.

On Wednesday, volunteers began calling the more than 600 people who said they were interested in the build, using the Youth and Family Services building at 1017 Tennessee Street as headquarters. While monetary donations are needed, companies and organizations also can donate materials to help close the budget gap, Waterman said.