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Recreation

Playground Fantástico of Napa to get rebuild

Jennifer Huffman

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Workers with American Canyon Builders were demolishing portions of the play equipment at Playground Fantástico on Tuesday morning. New equipment will be installed in the coming months. The park is temporarily closed.

J.L. Sousa, Register

Eighteen years ago, a group of volunteers began a project to create a new play space in the city of Napa — “a playground like none other.”

Named Playground Fantástico, it was built in south Napa, next to what is now Harvest and River middle schools on Old Sonoma Road.

During a six-day building blitz in summer 2002, thousands of volunteers descended on the space to donate their time and labor. Some \$400,000 was raised to build the playground. Public art installations were also included.

Today, “It has become a destination playground,” said Matt Eisenberg. A Napa father, Eisenberg was the project coordinator for the new play space. Playground Fantástico “is by far, the most used and beloved playground in Napa,” he said.

Because it is so well used, big changes are coming to the Playground Fantástico site yet again.

After many years of use and natural wear and tear, the wooden part of the playground – or about 70 percent of the structure – is now being demolished. It will be replaced with new playground equipment that should be installed in spring 2019.

“We’re hoping to celebrate Playground Fantástico’s past and plan for a future that continues to inspire children and families,” said Ali Koenig, Napa city parks and recreation project manager.

The city’s goal is to create “a one of a kind recreational/public art/cultural experience that does not exist anywhere else in the Napa Valley,” she said.

Demolition started on Monday, Oct. 22, and should last two to four weeks, said Koenig.

The playground will be closed until the construction and installation is complete, she said. That includes the parking lot of the playground as well.

The Playground Fantástico improvement project will replace the original wood structures and components of the playground that have reached the end of their useful life, said Koenig.

Playgrounds generally don't last more than 10 to 15 years, said Eisenberg. "It's had a long and normal lifespan."

The swings, public art, shade structures, engraved bricks, pathways and picnic area will all remain.

"The new play components will be made of materials that can withstand the elements and heavy use for many years to come," said Koenig.

To decide what to build next, the city of Napa and the Foundation for Napa Recreation formed a steering committee of community stakeholders, including organizations and individuals serving children and playground designer Landscape Structures Inc., said Koenig.

"The committee has been working intensely for six months on design development," she said.

The city budgeted approximately \$475,000 for the project. The Napa Valley Education Foundation, the initial financial sponsor, has about \$40,000 from the 2002 fundraising effort dedicated to rebuilding and long-term repair that can be used for the current project, said Koenig.

This combined amount is enough to replace the wooden components to meet current playground safety standards. However, to enhance the playground design with more customized, unique equipment, additional money would be needed, said Koenig.

Eisenberg estimated that another \$350,000 is needed for those enhancements.

“We need funds, and we need them as soon as possible,” he said.

“We need to raise the money to replace this Playground Fantástico with something equally creative and accessible,” and “to maintain the sense of wonder, creativity and fantástico,” of the park.

“Falling well short of our goals could mean we end up with a much more generic replacement for this community jewel,” he cautioned.

Unlike in 2002, this version of Playground Fantástico won't be constructed using the same community build labor model. The new structure will be prefabricated off site and then installed on site when completed. Opportunities for volunteers will be announced, said Koenig.

Eisenberg said even though his children have grown up, he still has a soft spot in his heart for Playground Fantástico.

“Can you believe it’s been 16 years?” he asked. “I think I’m getting old. But I’m just happy it lasted this long.”

To help rebuild Playground Fantástico:

Tax-deductible donations can be made to the Foundation for Napa Recreation earmarked for "Playground Fantástico Capital Campaign" and mailed to 1850 Soscol Ave., Suite 201, Napa, CA 94559

GoFundMe page: [gf.me/u/m45r4c](https://www.gofundme.com/u/m45r4c)

What do you want to see at Playground Fantástico?

Take a city of Napa survey here:

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Jennifer Huffman

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Jennifer Huffman is the business editor and a general assignment reporter for the Napa Valley Register. I cover a wide variety of topics for the newspaper. I've been with the Register since 2005.

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