

Cabot community celebrates park opening

By Chrissie Long/Staff Writer



Minutes after the grand opening ceremony at the Cabot Community Park in Newtonville, Wednesday morning, Oct. 31, 2007, Mary Morrison checks out the bench dedicated in her honor. Morrison was in the first kindergarten class to attend the adjacent Cabot Elementary School in 1929 and then worked at the school as a nurse and teacher's aide until retiring last year.

Photo by Jim Walker

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Newton - At one time, children looked out the window of Cabot School to see a dirt patch collecting trash and overgrown weeds.

A teacher once placed ladders in the empty space for children to climb on, remembers one longtime Cabot community member.

But the area has largely gone unused for the seven decades since the school opened.

That was until 2000, when a group of parents encouraged the community to start brainstorming a use for the space.

Crowded onto the sidewalk in front of Cabot School today, 400 children witnessed the culmination of that seven-year project.

Their principal, Marilynne Quarcoo, with the mayor at her side, spliced the ribbon, opening a little pocket park to classes and neighbors.

“We are here to dedicate – that means to make special – the area here [next to our school] now officially known as Cabot Community Park,” Quarcoo told the young children gathered in front of her. “We are here today because we want to say if you just give us a little bit of space, we can make wonderful things happen on it.”

Looking out at the students huddled together against the cold, Mayor David Cohen praised the community for its accomplishment.

“What you have done is turned an eyesore into an asset,” he said. “I hope each and every one of you gets a tremendous amount out of it for as long as you’re at Cabot Elementary School. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to make this vision a reality.”

After the children left, Margaret Hannah, a past Cabot parent who spearheaded the project, stood on the brick sidewalk and looked at the new park spreading out in front of her.

A shaded bench area invites visitors from the corner near the street. Separated by a manicured lawn, a half-circle granite amphitheater occupies the other corner for use as an outdoor classroom space.

“It was the longest gestation – the longest labor -- but the final product is well worth it,” said Hannah, who never imagined how many night meetings the project would require. “2000 is when we had the glimmer in our eye. It was very much of an eye sore at that time, but it had so much potential.”

She inspired classes to make diagrams about what they envisioned for the space. She talked to parents and community members, inviting their ideas. And, when it was time to build, parents lent their services.

Mike McSally designed the “hardscape” including the outdoor classroom. David Valbrecht lent his services as a landscape designer and Cliff Jewett completed the landscape work.

The PTO inspired donations from parents, campaigned for \$68,000 from the Community Preservation Act, and solicited volunteer hours from Garden City residents.

“The whole idea was to bring the community together,” Hannah said. “And there were so many people involved from the beginning...this is really the epitome of community preservation.”

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