

TOP

Local Project Vies For Pepsi Grant

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*By Annabeth Müller,
ShowMe Times Editor*

What happens when a caring community teams up with a major national product promotion?

If the community is Dexter, then the result could be a local project placing in the top 15 of Pepsi's Refresh Project and receiving a \$10,000 Pepsi Refresh Grant!

This spring Tanya Reiker looked at the playground equipment for pre-school children with special needs at Southwest Elementary. It's a playground that has been pieced together through the years and with a lot of local elbow grease and effort and a big helping of care and concern. But there was still something needed – some adaptive playground equipment for children with special needs.

Pepsi's "Refresh Projects" program began this spring with voting opening on May 1 for the Pepsi Refresh Project.

Each month, Pepsi is giving away more than \$1 million to 60 ideas that move communities forward. This year, Pepsi is also offering consumers the chance to make their votes go even further for the ideas that they believe will create a better, more vibrant world with Power Voting – using the codes on Pepsi products to help their favorite

projects rack up additional points.

Tania Reiker and fellow teacher Peggy Potts thought the idea of submitting a project was a good notion, but putting altogether was a bit daunting. Reiker said she went on a business trip with her husband Jim in April and she spent time studying the project and the process.

“I started working on the grant, and we got excited,” she said. She said they figured out to shoot a video and post on YouTube - one of the requirements in the Pepsi program - and maneuvered through the project process with national soft drink bottler.

Reiker said part of the reason for the project is the enormous cost of playgroup equipment and setting up a playground area for children with special needs. Reiker said equipment alone is quite expensive and federal, state and district funds would not cover the total cost of such a project. But the Southwest program did receive a federal grant to help get the playground process started – first by removing pea gravel in the area and then resurfacing the playground.

“There’s an adaptive swing that we’ve always wanted that is \$4,000,” she pointed out. “When it all could do with this federal grant money was resurface the area.”

In addition to children in wheelchairs, the program will have youngsters using walkers and other equipment. Surfaces with pea gravel or other loose product are not appropriate these children. A substantial surface – yet one that is safe for kids – is what is needed for the new playground.

Plans call for the Pepsi grant money - if the Dexter project wins - is to actually purchase some equipment for the children.

“They take the top 15 vote getters – and there were thousands and thousands,” Reiker said. Then after Pepsi weaned the list to 150 for voting, and the Dexter project made it. By June 1 Reiker and Potts received word the project made the cut and was one of those to be in the voting.

It’s been a gradual process, but as of Thursday the local project was ranked 8th in the voting. The top 15 projects in this category will each receive \$10,000 from Pepsi, with voting ending June 30.

Support is coming from throughout the community – with signs on soft drink machine all over town, and a special collection box at the Dexter Parks Complex, the Aquatic Center, folks “dumpster diving” through trash cans at the park, and collecting bottle caps at the Rib City Classic.

“People are really getting excited and collecting lids,” Reiker said with excitement. “We really, really want some of this adaptive playground equipment. You know, a child in a wheelchair never gets to feel the wind in their hair – a simple thing. But with an adaptive swing – can you imagine?”

WHAT: Pepsi Refresh

LOCAL PROJECT: "Create a playground appropriate for special needs preschoolers."

WEBSITE TO VOTE: <http://www.refresheverything.com/play2learn>

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