

Kids Kingdom II officially dedicated in memory of Connor Lourens

By Jonathan Graham

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LUNENBURG -- About 100 residents and their children attended a dedication ceremony Saturday afternoon for a new playground constructed in memory of a 7-year-old boy killed last year.

"This is to dedicate the playground and give a formal thanks to all the people who have been a part of this all the way through," said the boy's father, Ron Lourens, before the ceremony.

Lourens' son, Connor, died in February 2006 after a neighbor's dog attacked him.

The memorial playground at T.C. Passios Elementary School was constructed thanks to a large fundraising and volunteer effort made by residents, Lourens said.

"We miss Connor every day, and we will continue to keep his memory fresh every day of our lives," Lourens said, fighting back tears.

Ron Lourens and his wife, Nancy, held each other while others spoke at the ceremony, which took place under a light rain.

Children played on the new playground while Ron Lourens and others spoke.

The couple's two sons pulled a covering off of a large granite plaque erected in front of the playground.

The stone gives the playground's name, "Kids Kingdom II - Connor B. Lourens Memorial Playground." Next to the name is a graphic of a dinosaur on skis.

The new park replaced the original Kids Kingdom, which had needed to be replaced.

The Lourens family and other residents set up a basketball tournament, a golf tournament and a music festival -- "Connorfest" -- in an effort to raise money for the playground and other children's activities in town.

They have also created a Web site, ConnorLourens.org.

Jessica Parsons, who once taught Connor's music class during an internship, said that residents cannot turn back the clock, but they could try to make something good from it.

"I found myself proud that our community had rallied together in the face of such tragedy," she said.

Kim Wyson, whose 8-year-old son was friends with Connor, said so many residents helped during the fundraising and volunteer effort because of how close they felt to the tragedy.

She also said the Lourens family has been so strong; it encouraged others to step forward.

"It's something amazing about the two of them," Wyson said.