

LOCAL

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Truck full of play equipment for Midlands kids, seniors unveiled

HIGHLIGHTS

Sponsors hope vehicle will increase play opportunities for Columbia area children and seniors

Palmetto Homes, Mungo Homes, WellCare Health, Aflac and BlueChoice HealthPlan together put up \$50,000

Truck play equipment includes softballs, Frisbees, badminton, horseshoes, soccer balls and flag football





BY JOHN MONK

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COLUMBIA, SC — A truck full of hula hoops, nets, Frisbees, volleyballs, soccer balls and other play equipment is set to start making the rounds of Columbia Housing Authority developments and other public areas in the Midlands.

The idea is to bring the health benefits of exercise to children and seniors in communities where access to recreation is limited. An added benefit is the social boost neighborhoods get from having an outlet for structured play, said sponsors who showed off the truck at an unveiling Wednesday at Drew Park.

“If our vision of having a healthy, educated, talented entrepreneurial city is to become real, we all have to work together,” said Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin, a backer of youth sports programs, who spoke at the unveiling.

It took numerous people and entities working together to buy the truck and play equipment, said Benjamin, citing it as an example of a worthwhile public-private partnership.

Although the project was the brainchild of David Lominack, who had helped develop a similar program in Greenville, Lominack had to find sponsors in Columbia who would come up with the \$50,000 to pay for the truck, equipment and related costs.

“Adequate exercise is a critical part of living a healthy lifestyle,” said Lominack, TD Bank’s market president for the state. He also spoke at the gathering.

Chief sponsors are Palmetto Homes, Mungo Homes, WellCare Health Plan, Aflac and BlueChoice HealthPlan Medicaid. Todd & Moore Sporting Goods also contributed.

The truck, a 2014 Chevrolet Express 355 commercial cutaway, will be operated through the Columbia Housing Authority. The Authority’s goal is to have two outgoing, sports-minded employees who have a good way with young and old people alike to operate the truck and go into the communities.

The project has been in the works for a year and a half, said Columbia Housing Authority executive director Gil Walker. At Lominack's urging, Walker visited Greenville to see how the truck, called a "Mobi-Rec," is used there.

Lominack said Greenville's effort has been up and running for two years. The idea for it was generated at a Riley Institute leadership initiative at Furman University that was developing a program to tackle childhood obesity by exploring new ways to make physical education more available.

Bobby Gist, chairman of the Columbia Housing Authority board, said the truck will go to housing projects and parks at times when children will be out, notably on the weekends.

The truck can make appearances at events as well, sponsors said.



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