

# Resident

COMMUNITY NEWS

## Children surprised with late gift after returning to school

### New playground designed with special needs in mind

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Resident Community News

Imagine a playground in such bad shape it fell apart when it was moved to make way for building construction. For over a year, students at Morning Star Catholic School didn't have swings or a slide or other playground equipment on which to play and expend their energy.

"The old playground was over by the high school Peace Garden and the intention was they were going to lift it and move it to the other side of the school. When they did that, it just fell apart and wasn't worth saving," said Maria Johnson, development director for Morning Star.

"All of a sudden the little kids [5-12 years old] did not have a playground for about a year and a half. I said 'Let's make it part of the building campaign,' so we started researching playgrounds and someone mentioned Kompan," she said. "Their playgrounds are really different."

Coach Natalie Bryan had visited the new playground at Boone Park South after it was installed in October 2016, so she got involved with Kompan representative Stacy Moseley.

"We wanted something easy for the kids to play on, something really inclusive and centered around helping the kids with their issues," said Johnson. "Stacy knew kids with autism like to spin and recommended the spinners. She recommended Pour-in-Place seamless ground cover, instead of mulch, for kids with balance issues and for wheelchair access."

The playground came with a hefty price tag, though – \$145,000, of which the ground cover was almost \$40,000.

At the dedication of the new high school in August 2017, Johnson set up a display board with the playground proposal. Warren Powers, a supporter of the school, started to ask some hard questions about why they picked that playground and why it cost so much.

"By the end of the ceremony, he said he would pay for the playground," Johnson said. His daughter, Nancy Powers, runs the Warren P. and Joanne C. Powers Charitable Foundation and has been involved with the school for a while, Johnson said, noting the Foundation has given smaller grants for specific needs, including a \$14,000 grant for high school furniture.

Playground construction began in December 2017 when the Christmas holiday started and finished the day before students came back to school. "Stacy was really on it and we didn't have any hiccups. It was like a Christmas present for the children," said Johnson.

"The dedication of this school's leadership, combined with Kompan's passion for creating inclusive play spaces for children of all abilities, has yielded a playground like no other in Jacksonville," said Moseley.



Morning Star Catholic School Principal Jean Barnes with Warren and Joanne Powers on the new playground with students and Nova, the service dog.



Installation of the new playground occurred during the Christmas break.



Finished playground at Morning Star Catholic School.