

DEERFIELD

Deerfield Park District names renovated playground in honor of late resident with autism

By KARIE ANGELL LUC
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Connor Daly, 18, of Deerfield, and a 2020 Deerfield High School graduate, rides a swing similar to the one that Kenny Rudin used to love to swing on. The Deerfield Park District held a ribbon cutting ceremony Aug. 16, 2020, officially opening the renovated Brickyards Park playground that has been renamed the Kenny Rudin Playground in honor of Rudin, also a DHS alum. (Karie Angell Luc / Pioneer Press)

The Deerfield Park District dedicated the Kenny Rudin Playground at Brickyards Park earlier this month, with family and friends of the namesake play area in attendance.

Kenny Rudin, 24, for whom the playground is named, died Jan. 3, 2019.

After a ceremonial red ribbon cutting, the facility officially opened as the Kenny Rudin Playground. His parents, Scott and Debbie Rudin, and brother, David, and other friends and relatives attended the Aug. 16 dedication ceremony.

"Kenny was on the autistic spectrum, he had autism," said Debbie Rudin. "Kenny was actually very healthy, he swam a mile the night before [he died], a typical Wednesday night, with a social swim group."

Debbie Rudin explained that her son was in good health and she recalled the fateful morning he was discovered in his bedroom.

He died of SUDEP, or sudden unexpected death in epilepsy, his mother said.

"It brings awareness (to SUDEP)," she said.

The Kenny Rudin Playground now features inclusive options, including sensory integration and adaptive equipment to support play for individuals with and without disabilities, according to the Deerfield Park District.

Renovation of the park was part of a rotation of facility upgrades the Park District does, according to officials. The Rudin family contributed about half of the \$250,000 cost to upgrade the playground at Brickyards Park that now bears the class of 2013 Deerfield High School alum's name.

On the cover of the dedication program, Kenny Rudin is pictured taking a ride on a playground disc swing. One similar to the disc swing that he rode is installed at the renamed park.



Scott and Debbie Rudin, of Deerfield, and their son, David Rudin, center, cut the ribbon Aug. 16, 2020 to open the renovated Brickyards Park playground that has been renamed the Kenny Rudin Playground in honor of their late son and brother. (Karie Angell Luc / Pioneer Press)



Debbie Rudin, of Deerfield, left, waves to a well-wisher as she is seated next to her husband Scott Rudin during the Deerfield Park District ribbon cutting ceremony Aug. 16, 2020. The event officially opened the renovated Brickyards Park playground that has been renamed the Kenny Rudin Playground in honor of their late son. (Karie Angell Luc / Pioneer Press)

Since the fall of 2019, the Deerfield Park District worked with the Rudin family on the playground renovation. In addition to the parents' donation, friends and relatives of the Rudin family were also donors to the project, according to Park District officials.

The timeline for renaming the playground started when younger brother, David Rudin, and four of his friends wanted to sponsor a piece of playground equipment in Kenny's name and reached out to the Deerfield Park District via email.

The playground idea grew from there and, "started becoming more involved," Debbie Rudin said.

"They always looked out for Kenny and had a special relationship," Debbie Rudin said about David and his friends.



Jeff Nehila, Deerfield Park District executive director, pictured, addressed the audience Aug. 16, 2020 during the ribbon cutting ceremony that officially opened the renovated Brickyards Park playground that has been renamed the Kenny Rudin Playground. (Karie Angell Luc / Pioneer Press)



Louie Zagoras, of Evanston, and of Rollover band fame, performed during the Aug. 16, 2020 Deerfield Park District ribbon cutting ceremony that officially opened the renovated Brickyards Park playground that has been renamed the Kenny Rudin Playground. (Karie Angell Luc / Pioneer Press)

During the dedication, a resolution was read by Rick Patinkin, president of the Deerfield Park District Board of Commissioners. Before reading the resolution, Patinkin acknowledged the community, the village of Deerfield and its residents, "for your love, for your generosity, and your dedication to detail in creating this tribute to Kenny."

The Rudin family worked with park planners on equipment selection to align with what Kenny would have enjoyed, officials said.

"It really worked out well," Jeff Nehila, Deerfield Park District executive director, said about the collaboration. "It's not often that we, in our profession, get to work on something like this."

Visible in concrete to both playground entrances are bronze shoe sole impressions of Kenny's baby shoes, also athletic shoes from when he was a young adult.

"He was a pretty amazing guy in those shoes," Debbie Rudin said about Kenny.

David Rudin, 22, a 2016 Deerfield High School graduate, said he hopes people feel the spirit of his brother in the park and enjoy their time there.

"This is kind of a culmination of everything that we felt he would like," David Rudin said about the playground.

Julie LaBunski, of Deerfield, pushed her 18-year-old Connor Daly on that disc swing the same day of the dedication. Connor, a 2020 DHS grad, has autism, his mother said.

"I think that the joy of being him (Connor) is living in the moment. For him, he enjoys being in the moment, he lives for the moment more than the most of us," LaBunski said tearfully.

Louie Zagoras, of Evanston, of the band Rollover, performed during the park dedication on acoustic Martin guitar.

"I think this park is just blowing me away how beautiful it is and how many kids it's going to help," Zagoras said.

Zagoras performed songs that appeared, with some of lyrics, on bench plaques around the Kenny Rudin Playground. Artists include Coldplay, Randy Newman, Jon Bon Jovi, Queen, The Beatles and Phil Collins.

"I'm all about bringing people together for good, that's what I'm always all about and this is exactly something that I like to play for," Zagoras said.

Scott Rudin became visibly emotional at the podium as he stood before the audience with his wife and son.

He went on to say, "We really believe that Kenny was here to be a teacher.

"He taught Debbie and I, our family, and he also taught a lot of his teachers and his peers about special needs people," he said. "We think everyone on Earth is here for a purpose."

Karie Angell Luc is a freelancer.



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