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## **BENNETT'S VILLAGE TO HOST COMMUNITY EVENT AT PEN PARK**

**CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – September 8, 2021** – Bennett's Village, a local non-profit dedicated to building an all-abilities playground, will hold a community fun day to unveil their award-winning concept at its future home in Pen Park on September 19<sup>th</sup> from 1-5pm. There will be tours of the playground and treehouse site as well as rock painting, food and music, and group movement and dancing led by the Charlottesville Ballet.

Bennett's Village is named after Bennett McClurken-Gibney – a boy who loved to play and happened to use a wheelchair to get around. Nearby playgrounds are not designed for everyone, like those in wheelchairs or those with sensory disabilities. If Bennett's family wanted him to have the freedom to play, they had to drive to Richmond, home of Park365, the nearest accessible playground.

Bennett's sudden passing in February of 2018, at just five years old, left an immeasurable sense of loss in the lives of all who loved him. Inspired by his wish to have a birthday party at Park365, his family and friends decided to create a place in the Charlottesville community where all children and adults could enjoy the magic of connecting with the world and each other.

"We want it to be for everyone, so the more people we can talk to and hear from, the better," founder and mom to Bennett, Kara McClurken said. "A lot of people think that playgrounds are just for kids, but our vision is that this is a multi-generational play area. Whether you are a child in a wheelchair or a young parent or a grandparent, you can play there. One in four adults in the U.S. are living with a disability that impacts major life activities--including play. The concept we are creating is not just for kids--we want it to be a space for everyone."

Bennett's Village has partnered with the award-winning Baltimore-based landscape architecture firm Mahan Rykiel Associates (MRA) to make this idea and vision a reality for people with mobility limitations, sensory processing disorders, and developmental delays. The playground will cover three acres and will eventually include fully-accessible play structures and spaces, a tree house, sensory garden, cableway, water play area, restroom pavilion, and native landscaping.

The first phase of the project will be the Treehouse which is the current fundraising focus. The Treehouse will be constructed behind the existing playground and extend into the tree canopy so people of all abilities can experience truly being surrounded by nature. There will be at-grade access to the Treehouse and a switchback trail that will allow those who use wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers the ability to reach the lower level.

For more information on how you can help Bennett's Village make Charlottesville a place where all can play, visit us online at [bennettsvillage.org](http://bennettsvillage.org). You can also find us on Instagram at [BennettsVillage](https://www.instagram.com/BennettsVillage).

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