



REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE DAVID C. ONLEY, O.ONT.
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF ONTARIO
GROUNDBREAKING FOR NESHAMA ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND
Oriole Park, Toronto
June 8, 2008

Your Royal Highness, Your Worship, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to join you today in breaking ground for this innovative and timely playground that will be universal, accessible and inclusive.

In a perfect world, all playgrounds would be this way. But in our world, before children with disabilities can even get into a playground, there are barriers to be overcome in the traditional park environments. Then the playgrounds themselves present further barriers, proving neither welcoming nor participatory.

I know that the City of Toronto has approved plans to make all of Toronto's buildings, parks and public spaces fully accessible. But it is the nature of cities that even the most progressive move slowly from planning to reality, and so it took a private initiative to kick start Neshama Playground – a significant step towards meeting Toronto's accessibility commitments and a model for other communities in the province.

I'm told that Neshama, from the Hebrew word for 'soul,' can also be used in slang to denote a "good soul." The private sector steering committee, self-described as "a bunch of guys," has proved its neshama by developing the vision, guiding principles and concept design plan for this playground. In addition, they have initiated a highly successful fundraising effort, and taken care of consultations with councillors, local residents, and community stakeholders.

We're told that "mighty oaks from little acorns grow." Neshama Playground came from a chance meeting, on a plane from New York, between Steven Skurka and Tom Caldwell. They shared a magazine article about facilities for children with disabilities, and agreed that Toronto needed a playground that would allow children with physical and cognitive disabilities to enjoy the universal right of all kids to just mess about in a playground, hang out with their friends, and have fun.

As The Queen's representative in Ontario, I commend the Parks Forestry and Recreation Division of the City of Toronto for working closely with Neshama to make this wonderful playground a reality. And I thank Steve Skurka, Tom Caldwell and the rest of their "bunch of guys" for sharing with us their vision of an accessible and inclusive play experience for all children.

Thank you. Merci!



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