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A park for Harper: Dad aims to create Portland playground that disabled children can use, too

By The Oregonian

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Harper Goldberg, 4, could swing all day at North Portland's Arbor Lodge Park, says her dad, Cody Goldberg. But if Cody Goldberg succeeds in his plan, she'll be able to use a whole play structure at the park.

Like most 4-year-olds, Harper Rose Goldberg loves her neighborhood park. Unlike her preschool-age peers, however, Harper can't use the slide or climb on the play structure. A rare genetic condition prevents Harper from walking on her own.

But her father, Cody Goldberg, hopes to transform North Portland's Arbor Lodge Park into a place where Harper and children of all abilities can play together.

A month into her life, Harper was diagnosed with **Emanuel Syndrome**, an exceedingly rare disorder -- with only 200 or so documented cases worldwide -- that causes severe developmental delays and weak muscle tone, rendering most who have it unable to walk or talk. That includes Harper.

"We went through a mourning process," said Goldberg, 41, describing how he and his wife, April, 35, grieved over their child's condition and its many unknowns, including life expectancy. (The couple also have an 18-month-old daughter, Lennon, who has no sign of the condition.)

After enduring surgeries to help her breathe and move more easily, Harper is thriving. She smiles, sits upright and takes steps with the aid of her parents and a pint-size walker. Her favorite place to stroll is Arbor Lodge Park near her house, which her dad wants her to enjoy to the fullest.

Goldberg envisions an all-inclusive play structure by **Boundless Playgrounds**, a Connecticut company that integrates wheelchair- and walker-friendly elements into play equipment. He was inspired by a similar structure in

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Emanuel Syndrome:

The rare disorder is triggered when small portions of two chromosomes are duplicated, throwing off the body in dramatic ways. Most of the 200 or so people worldwide

Washington Park, now the only one of its kind in Portland.

He also wants the overall park to be accessible. "I want to make sure that the entire grounds are solid enough that someone using wheels as an aid can get everywhere," he said.

The **Arbor Lodge Neighborhood Association** has embraced the plan, voting to approve it at a March meeting. Chris Duffy, the association chairwoman, called Goldberg's vision "a wonderful project for the neighborhood."

"It brought tears to my eyes," said Goldberg, the business director for **Adidas Eyewear**. "It was a big step that made me know it was going to happen."

But finding the money -- estimated at \$200,000 to pay for the play structure and cover the **Bureau of Parks & Recreation's** review process and maintenance plans -- is a problem.

Sue Glenn, a bureau manager, is working with Goldberg on the project. The bureau has designated North Portland as needing a "destination" playground, and Glenn wholeheartedly supports Goldberg's plan. But the economic climate and an already-long list of needed parks improvements have put it on the back burner for now.

Still, Glenn said, "We're seeing if we can identify a parallel vision and goals for our projects."

Goldberg is moving ahead. Last month, he lined up a pledge of \$10,000 from **Reliable Credit Association**, a Milwaukie consumer finance company whose president, Lee Holzman, is Harper's uncle. He has also approached the community involvement group at Adidas and plans to "engage with local companies who already support people with different abilities."

North Portland Community Works, a nonprofit serving organizations in the area, is providing fiscal sponsorship, or legal and tax-exempt status, to Cody's organization, **Harper's Playground**, which he started this year. Community Works Director Tom Griffin-Valade said his office will be "providing them with technical support -- how to go after funding sources and reach out to the community."

He added: "Because of the paucity of these kinds of facilities, I think the park will attract people from all over the city."

Goldberg hopes to have the changes ready by summer 2011 but knows that's "a tough hill to climb."

But Griffin-Valade has faith: "After talking to Cody, you can't come away not feeling optimistic about his chances."

-- **Rebecca Robinson**

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or so people worldwide diagnosed with Emanuel Syndrome are severely mentally delayed and cannot walk or talk. Find more at emanuelsyndrome.org

How to help: Go to harpersplayground.com, e-mail, call 503-730-5445 or mail donations to Harper's Playground, c/o North Portland Community Works, 2209 N. Schofield St., Portland, OR 97217