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## Mission Success Formula: Satisfaction = The Total Number of

It was a long summer. August is still sort of a blur. I volunteered to be the coordinator for a playground building project at Ruffing Montessori School where my six- and nine-year-old daughter and son attend. The school is forty years old – the second oldest of its kind in the country. My wife and I are very keen on the philosophy, the staff, and the administration, and so are very inclined to support projects that will enhance the overall environment.

My son David started at Ruffing six years ago, but last Spring I remarked that I still did not know much about the way things worked there, or who the major players were (besides the kids). So I ran for secretary of the newly formed Parent Association, unopposed. I won.

It wasn't long before the playground project was looking for a manager. The whole diagram fit on one 8 1/2 by 11" piece of paper. It looked do-able. I raised my hand and the inaugural Parent Association project was mine.

One of the most attractive aspects of the project was the money saved if volunteers assembled the structure, up to 40% of the total cost. That was substantial. As artistic director of a nonprofit, that was all I needed to see. My task was to line up the volunteers, accept delivery of the playground components, remove the old

structures, prepare the site, order the cement, and pray for good weather.

Playground Systems, Inc. provided the ADA approved, kid-tested equipment. The new design would provide ten times the creative opportunities for play and fitness than the current array of pipes and timbers afforded. And clearly, the start of the school year would be unforgettable with an all-new configuration of tubes and slides and glides where the wood chips are. The motivation was there; the equipment was ordered; the hunt for volunteers began.

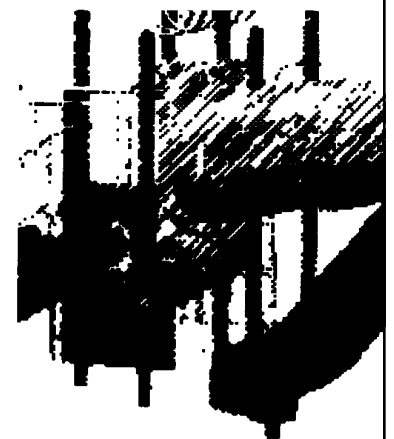
All major projects begin slowly, and nothing is as simple as the diagram on a single page suggests. Eighty holes had to be dug nearly three feet deep with the aid of a Bobcat equipped with an 18" auger. Ninety-five was not only the temperature that day, it was also the number of boulders that stopped the auger from turning smoothly, hole after hole. I was worn out just getting the site ready for the build.

As the assembly day approached, volunteers came forward ready to put the pieces together, feed the workers, and look after the wee folk who also came for the day. Nearly eighty volunteers made the effort to transform a barren holey ground into a children's wonderland.

Watching dads and moms work in teams to pre-assemble smaller components and collaborate with

other teams when platforms needed to be held in place for securing was truly an inspiration. None of these parents had ever worked on a Ruffing project like this before. This "barn-raising" was distinctly different from all "fund-raiding" efforts they had previously been part of. Here they learned new names, earned new blisters, and contributed more muscle than they had in prior school events. This was an unforgettable experience.

At the end of the day, they all left, one and two at a time, glancing back at the completed project. Every platform was level, every pole was plumb, and every hole was filled with cement. The playground stood as a silent testimony to the contribution that only parents could make for their children.



Now, you might be thinking to yourself: "This is a wonderful story, but what is it doing on the ReSource page of *The Beacon*? What does this have to do with performing arts?" Here's my thought.