

Parent-Approved Playgrounds



by Matt
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Let me start off with a big congratulations to YOU, my fellow New Bedford-dwelling parents of small children. The winter of 2010-11 has come to a close just in time to refresh our diminished recollection of the three other seasons we enjoy as New Englanders. The time has come to stow away your kids' snow suits and break out... well, your kids. After all, there's about five months worth of energy pent up in their little bodies, and I'm willing to bet that 90% of those Christmas toys need new batteries by now. However, thanks to the wonders of spring, we can all put off replacing them for a while in lieu of more active outdoor fun, and for the urban parent, this means many trips to neighborhood playgrounds.

That being said, most parents have a particular playground of choice. My wife and I found ours about two years ago. If you're at all familiar with the Betsy B. Winslow School in the west end, you may have heard of their top-notch, state-of-the-art playground. Completely renovated in 2008, the Anne F. Asekoff Playground is named after a retired principal of the school. If you haven't heard of the place, allow me to construct the scene for you: Picture a 9,000 square foot, pond-shaped space, classically bordered by schoolyard lawn and filled with wood chips. Emerging out of this familiar foundation are several eye-catching, brilliant blue and yellow play structures positioned in a deliberate manner throughout the area.



Upon closer observation of these towering bodies you start to focus on the finer details within them. You discover handles that turn gears and hidden “rooms,” containing features such as small seating arrangements, built-in musical instruments, and imagination-encouraging décor

throughout, giving a sense of theme to various parts of the playground. After you’ve had a moment to comb over these visually dominant structures, your eyes start to follow a seemingly endless path that weaves sleekly around and in between them, made up of four types of monkey bars, stretches of kid-sized lily pads, and other unique obstacles.

Tired yet? I hope not. Also sprawled throughout this well-organized space you will find a plethora of intriguingly original, ready-to-play activities, including a giant web of rope, a truly enthralling turntable-like object that spins users in tight circles as they are propelled by their own gravity, and of course the essential swing set.

If all this sounds too challenging for your toddlers, don’t worry—there’s a special area just for them, equipped with sit-and-ride bumblebees, a fire engine-themed play set, and a crawl-through hippopotamus complete with a labeled diagram of the animal’s internal anatomy—a good example of the playground’s intensive attention to detail.

Although the playground has plenty of great features that simply cannot be found anywhere else, the quality of the playground is not among its most valuable assets as far as I’m

concerned. While the Anne F. Asekoff playground is exceptional, there are many other places for kids to play around the city that are equally enjoyable. So, what makes this place so special that I just had to tell you all about it?



For one, every parent can appreciate the absence of obscene, adolescent graffiti that plagues even the city's most reputable and beloved parks. Another thing you won't find here are unsupervised neighborhood children running wild, swearing and playing too rough. As a parent, it's always uncomfortable to be put in a position where you must either discipline random kids that aren't yours or tell your kids to stay away from them, which does no good if troublemakers continue to follow them around anyway.

The Anne F. Asekoff playground also gains points for being an easy place to keep track of your kids. There are a lot of great playgrounds (like Buttonwood Park and Riverside Park) that are separated and spread out into different sections. This type of layout of course makes for a good sized playground with plenty to explore and do, but it can be extremely challenging to keep your eye on kids darting from one area to another amongst a bunch of other kids doing the same.

The Anne F. Asekoff Playground is different in its efficient, well-planned use of a smaller space, offering the variety of a larger park in a compact version. Benches going all the way around the border of the area make it easy and convenient to relax while in view of virtually the whole playground from just about any point. Also, the wide-open space surrounding the playground makes it hard for children to wander away and not be seen.



Last but not least, it is well-maintained and safe for your kids to play on. There's no need to worry about them going down a slide with a missing bottom half or getting whipped with the broken chain from a swing (if you don't know what I'm talking about, take a look at some of the other school playgrounds around the city). In a damaged state, playground activities become major safety hazards that all too often go neglected as neighborhood kids continue to play on the same dilapidated playgrounds for generations in some cases.

In the end, we are truly fortunate in New Bedford to have as many great places to enjoy with our families as we do. The scenery at Fort Tabor is unmatched as far as playgrounds go. The Buttonwood Park playground, like Anne F. Asekoff, has been renovated to be jam-packed with the latest features in playground construction. And Riverside Park is an ideal place to let kids go on a bike ride in between play. However, while almost everyone is familiar with these locations, The Anne F. Asekoff Playground is more of a hidden jewel in our city—a hidden jewel well worth discovering this season.

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