

Fairy tale comes true in school-yard renewal

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The sun was beating down on the asphalt play area yesterday at St. Charles Catholic School, but soon it will shine on new playground equipment.

While most elementary schools are surrounded by green space and a playground, students at the Dufferin Street and Lawrence Avenue area school play in a "concrete jungle" that lacks shading, as there are no trees to shield the youngsters from the bright sun or grass to run around on, said Ward 5 Trustee Maria Rizzo of the Toronto Catholic District School Board, during yesterday's ground-breaking ceremony.

"Do you believe in fairy tales?" Rizzo asked some 120 students gathered on the asphalt during the ceremony. "I knew one day I would be old enough to believe in fairy tales again. Today begins the fairy tale and marks the transformation into a beautiful area from a concrete jungle."

The project was made possible by Tricon Films and Television, which has funded the design, materials and installation of the new playscape area.

Tricon will film the playground construction throughout its various stages until its scheduled completion date May 15.

"I'm so excited," said Shaam Makan, vice-president of production for Tricon. "I knew something had to be done for the land and most importantly for the students of St. Charles."

Joseph Bellissimo, principal of St. Charles, told The Mirror the process began in October when Makan visited the school and met with parents to discuss plans for a new show, Green Forest, in which the production company would give back to the community by funding much-needed school yard green space.

"There is not one tree, not one blade of grass, not one bench," Bellissimo said. "In the winter it's an ice field. In the summer there is nowhere to hide."

Bellissimo said he was informed in March the school was selected for the show.

"It's unbelievably exciting," he said.

The revamped area will include a grassy field, an amphitheatre for outdoor teaching, a peace garden, trees lining the area on both the north and south sides, new basketball nets and a play structure for kindergarten students.

"Everything is being donated, there is no cost to the school or school board," Bellissimo said. "We really need green spaces."

Julie Giraldi, chair of the St. Charles parent council, said she was "thrilled to pieces" over the project, which will provide the 250 kindergarten to Grade 8 students with a play area many students at other schools take for granted.

"I think it's a wonderful opportunity for the children to get what they deserve," she said, adding her daughter, Simone, is anxiously awaiting the play area's completion. "These are our future doctors and lawyers and I want them to be inspired."