

School playground gets makeover with new reality television show

(Posted Date: Friday, May 5, 2006)

By Sandie Benitah

Recess will never be the same again for children attending St. Charles Catholic School.

By the end of this month, they will not only have a new half-million dollar playground, but they'll also be reality TV stars.

Thanks to a partnership with HGTV, Tricon films, the city and the catholic school board, St. Charles asphalt concrete jungle will be replaced with an amphitheatre, a peace garden and much greenery to play in.



DIGGING IT: School reps and local politicians kick off project to remake the St. Charles Catholic School yard.

"This is proof there really are angels out there," said Maria Rizzo, school trustee.

She was the one who first brought Tricon officials out to the playground when she heard they were shopping for grim-looking public spaces to makeover for a new reality TV show, *Green Force*.

Not only was St. Charles selected, but it's the first public space the team is making over. Camera crews set up the last week of April and began shooting "before" footage prior to the official start of construction May 2 in front of a crowd of about 100 students and teachers.

"St. Charles is definitely the largest project of the season," said Shaam Makan, vice president of production for Tricon, the company producing the show. "Once I saw it, I knew it was a place we had to do. I remembered growing up and having track and field and I took it for granted. Here, they don't even have a blade of grass."

All together, 13 spots around the city will be picked for a complete rejuvenation.

Makan said it's his way to thank the community for its services and to tell stories about the communities themselves.

"We're helping communities that have helped us all, whether it be schools or shelters or day cares," he said.

Unbelievably, each project is expected not to take longer than two weeks to complete.

Rizzo said she wasn't sure how exactly they were going to manage the project on such a short time frame but she was thankful to the city for limiting the amount of bureaucratic

red tape.

"The government doesn't usually move this fast," she noted.

Parents and students at the school were surveyed and consulted before the team came up with the design. Rizzo said the kids could have asked for things like a golf course or swimming pool, but all they asked for was grass.

The community was also consulted. Both city councillor Howard Moscoe and Rizzo sent out notices informing people about the project and asking for their patience during filming.

Tricon is funding the project largely through sponsorship money, said Moscoe. He said neither the school board nor the city is contributing anything other than talent and cooperation.

Tricon is well-known for its show, *Restaurant Makeover*, where drab eateries around the city were given a much-needed face-lift. They are also behind Much Music reality shows such as *Much in Your Space* and *Fandemonium*.