

# WildPlay adds zip to Colwood

## Victoria outdoor adventure firm to build high-wire obstacle course

BY DARRON KLOSTER, TIMES COLONIST AUGUST 25, 2009



Tom Benson says deals with cities and municipalities provide a huge growth opportunity for WildPlay.

**Photograph by:** Adrian Lam, Times Colonist, Times Colonist

Calling it a win-win for both sides, the city of Colwood and an outdoor adventure company are turning a chunk of forest near Bear Mountain Arena into a high-wire obstacle course.

WildPlay Element Parks started remediation work in the five-acre forest -- a former Frisbee golf course near the velodrome -- last week and expects to open ziplines, bridges, scramble nets, swinging logs and other equipment by November.

The aerial obstacle course, parts of it suspended 18 metres above the ground, is designed more for locals than for tourists. It will enhance fitness and outdoor programs at West Shore Parks and Recreation, administrator Linda Barnes said at a press conference at the site yesterday.

Mayor Dave Saunders said Colwood signed a five-year lease agreement with WildPlay and the city will get a portion of admission costs. He said proceeds will go to West Shore Parks for programs and to finish a parking lot that's been roughed in at the site.

Victoria-based WildPlay, which operates the Bungy Zone and obstacle park in Nanaimo and a zipline course in Whistler, is paying for more than \$80,000 in remediation costs to clean the site of deadfall and litter, erect fencing and build proper trails. WildPlay also assumes risk and liability issues on the

property.

"As a parent, I'm ecstatic about this project and I think other parents and users will be, too," said Saunders. "I don't like to see kids play video games all the time. I'd rather have them out interacting with nature, and that's what this course will do."

Saunders said the Frisbee golf course was closed after the forest area took a beating and Colwood put itself at risk with hanging limbs and other debris posing threats to users.

Saunders, an arborist, put in about \$8,000 worth of work to the site to maintain it, but the costs to continue doing so were prohibitive for the city.

Barnes said Colwood "will end up with a healthier forest" after WildPlay's development of the site.

Not to mention healthier citizens, she added.

West Shore Parks will incorporate WildPlay's so-called Monkido course (that's a play on monkey see monkey do, as users are encouraged to follow others through the course) into regular recreation programming such as day and summer camps.

She said lower prices have also been negotiated for low-income families.

West Shore Parks and Recreation includes the communities of Colwood, Langford, Metchosin, View Royal, Highlands and the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area.

The fee schedule was not released yesterday.

The course is split to accommodate kids seven through 13 or seven through adult, depending on ability. It will be open

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to start.

The course allows users to move independently through a series of progressively challenging tree-to-tree elements. Everyone is supplied with the equipment such as harnesses, lanyards, carabineers and pulleys.

Tom Benson, president and general manager of WildPlay, said recreation partnerships with cities and municipalities present a huge expansion opportunity for the company.

"Our generation grew up playing in trees, making our fun in the forest ... kids nowadays don't, but we want to change that," said Benson. "This concept makes a ton of sense to us and we'd like to make it a household concept in Canada."

Benson and co-founder Gordon Ross spent more than a decade as mountain climbing guides in Canada and throughout the world, but wanted to bring the thrill of their craft to everyday people in adventure climbing parks accessible to all.

Benson said three more WildPlay parks are in the negotiation stage -- at Bamberton, where the company is discussing an aerial park with developer Three Point Properties, at an undisclosed spot on the North Island and in Surrey.

The company will hire about 20 staff for year-round operations at Colwood and up to 30 in peak summer season.

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