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## Aspetuck introduces natural playground

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Sydney and Josh Brant of Fairfield and Logan Hayden of Stratfield test out the tower stairs at Aspetuck Land Trust's new all natural playground, which opens Saturday, June 12.

**The Aspetuck Land Trust** announces the opening on June 12 of its Children's Natural Playground, the first of its kind in the area dedicated to nurturing a love of nature and open space among children ages, 3 to 7. The playground, which comprises approximately 10,000 square feet in a meadow in the Leonard Schine nature preserve in Westport offers its youthful visitors places for fort-building, digging, tower-climbing, trail-walking, stick-stacking and arts and crafts, to

name a few. There's an even an "elfin village," where younger visitors can play with pine cone "dolls," honing both their imaginations and their fine motor skills.

"An innovative playground like this creates the basis for a lifelong relationship with natural spaces," says **David Brant**, director of the Aspetuck Land Trust. "Since young children often don't have opportunities to explore nature in their daily lives, we wanted to create a special place where they could do just that."

The Natural Playground comprises a variety of play areas with names like Bear's Den, Stick Stack, The Tower and Sand Pit. Much of the inspiration and design for these comes from a natural playground at the **Minnesota Landscape Arboretum**. All of the play areas have been constructed out of natural materials, primarily red cedar, found natively in the **Leonard Schine Preserve**, and sticks, logs, saplings, pine cones and acorns collected by a volunteer corps made up of Land Trust members, and of nearby businesses, including DLTC USA, a local tree company owned by Westport resident **Jon Sweeney**.

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David Brant expects that Natural Playground will undergo a certain amount of evolution over time, as children begin to interact and create with it. He notes that the possibilities for additional play areas and structures are virtually limitless. "Our Natural Playground is a wonderful place for parents to explore and share with their young children. We're confident it will awaken a sense of discovery in both."

Aspetuck Land Trust Board Member, **Chris Thomas** commented: "Today's children have access to many wonders of technology, ever increasing their awareness of the world they live in. Unfortunately, a downside to the use of technology is a phenomena that experts are calling the "nature deficit disorder." According to the **Kaiser Family Foundation** researchers, Children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years spend an average of 1.5 hours with electronic media on a daily basis, whereas children between the ages of 8 and 18 years spend an average of nearly 6.5 hours a day with electronic media.<sup>1</sup> The Aspetuck Land Trust believes that there are numerous benefits derived from outdoor play in a natural setting; fresh air, exercise, and imaginative play to name a few.

For directions and a map of the preserve visit [www.aspetucklandtrust.org](http://www.aspetucklandtrust.org) and click on Maps/Westport/Leonard Schine Preserve.

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