

PRESS RELEASE - REVISED

December 13, 2004

Contact: Sue Ochs, Wesley School Principal at (231) 773-9158
Marsha Bouwman, Wesley School Instructional Assistant at (231) 773-9158
Donald Arseneau, Lovell Moore Masonic Lodge #182, Wesley School Teacher
at (231) 773-9158
Steven Keith, Shriners of Muskegon County, at (231) 206-7909

Photograph: Back Row, Left to Right: Barb James, Wesley School Instructional Assistant (IA); Josh, Jon, and Henry (Wesley Students); Marsha Bouwman, Wesley School Instructional Assistant
Front Row, Left to Right: Steven Keith, Lovell Moore Masonic Lodge 182 and Shriner; Henry Roesler, Montague/Whitehall Masonic Lodge 198; Edward Rust, Muskegon Masonic Lodge 140 and Shriner; Donald Arseneau, Lovell Moore Masonic Lodge 182 and Shriner; and Sue Ochs, Principal of Wesley School.

Shriners and Masons Add Final Piece to Playground Puzzle

Thanks to local Shriners and Masons, 170 Wesley School students will now have ramp access to a barrier-free playground. Although the initial play structure was built in 2000, many Wesley students could not reach it. Puzzled over how to finance the costly ramps and specially textured sidewalks needed, Marsha Bouwman, Wesley School Instructional Assistant, wrote a letter to the local Shriners.

The Muskegon Shrine Club voted to support the project. Then they enlisted the help of all four Masonic Lodges in Muskegon County: Lovell Moore 182, Muskegon 140, Montague/Whitehall 198, and Ravenna 441. Steven Keith, member of the Lovell Moore Lodge 182, guided the fund-raising efforts. Donations from each lodge were matched by the Michigan Masonic Foundation to result in a combined total of \$6,000. The ramps will be installed later this month, while the sidewalks will be poured next spring.

The students who attend Wesley School live in Muskegon County, range in age from 2- to 26-years old, and have varying levels of both physical and mental disabilities. According to Bouwman, the students naturally develop social skills, physical development, emotional growth, and communication skills during play regardless of ability. "All of these basic areas of learning are important to everyone's development and success in life," said Bouwman.

Steven Keith, Shriner and member of Lovell Moore Lodge 182, said the playground project fit right into the kind of work done by the local Mason and Shrine Club organizations. Keith said, "Masons are one of the oldest and largest fraternal philanthropic organizations in the nation. Every 24 hours they contribute over \$1.65 million by funding scholarships, medical research, free children's hospitals for burn treatment and orthopedic issues, and other initiatives involving

cerebral palsy, facial and cranial work, diabetes, vision, dyslexia, and schizophrenia in youth.” Well known for bringing the circus to town each year, Shriners operate 22 children’s hospitals in the US and Mexico. Volunteer Shriners transport and provide meals to sick children and their families during their stay at the free medical care facilities.

Later this month, the Masons will purchase a \$1,100 special collapsible stroller for a Wesley student. Each year Shriners provide free circus tickets to Wesley School students along with over 5,400 other children in Muskegon County. Bouwman said, “The playground could not have been completed without the Mason and Shriner support. We are eternally grateful for all that they have done, and continue to do for our community’s children.”

The barrier-free playground project began in 1998 at a meeting of the Wesley School Improvement Committee. Community support began with a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County Youth Advisory Committee in 1999. A flurry of fundraising efforts resulted in many private and corporate donations including the sale of 180 commemorative bricks and a \$10,000 donation from Nowak Machined Products. In July 2000, 14,795 pounds of barrier-free playground equipment were purchased and assembled in front of MAISD’s Wesley School. It features transfer points for students who can use them, protective entrances to each activity, and areas that allow visually impaired children the freedom of independent exploration. In 2001 a \$3,000 grant from Citifinancial paid for baby swings, additional activity centers, and benches.

According to Wesley School Principal Sue Ochs and Wesley School Instructional Assistant Marsha Bouwman, who have co-chaired a committee of staff members to raise money for playground, they have raised over \$20,000.

The following have served as major donors, corporate sponsors, or provided grants:

Brenda Bowman Insurance	Christ Temple Apostolic Church
Comerica Bank	Fruitport Lion Charities
Greater Muskegon Jayees	Greater Muskegon Service League Foundation
Holton-Twin Lake Lions Club	LaPointe & Associates
Local 7278 UPIU	Lovell Moore Masonic Lodge 182
Mary Payne	Meijer
Mercy General Health Partners	Montague/Whitehall Masonic Lodge 198
Muskegon County Community Foundation	Muskegon Shrine Club
Muskegon Masonic Lodge 140	Norton Shores Kiwanis
Nowak Machined Products	Old Kent Bank
Ravenna Masonic Lodge 441	Ronald McDonald House Charities
SD Warren Services Co.	WalMart
Wesley School Parents and Staff	

###