



**M E D I A   R E L E A S E**

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**BUSINESS LEADER, ANONYMOUS DONOR PLEDGE  
SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO FORT KID**

Businessman Thomas Boyd has fond memories of growing up and playing at Fort Kid, and he wants to make sure his 1-year-old daughter, and everyone else in the area, has the same opportunity.

Boyd is helping to raise funds needed for a public-private collaboration to re-energize and upgrade the playground, which was constructed by volunteers 28 years ago and is in need of major repairs.

Knoxville Museum of Art Executive Director David Butler sees the huge untapped potential of engaging with families by extending public art and programming to the iconic Fort Kid play area across the street from the museum's front door. He is encouraged by the high level of community interest in and support for Fort Kid.

The City of Knoxville has designated \$300,000 in the 2019-20 budget to prepare the site for a safe and accessible Fort Kid, and that site-preparation work will begin toward the end of this year.

Community fundraising for the Fort Kid reconstruction immediately got off to a strong start: Thomas Boyd, owner of Rebel Kitchen, Old City Wine Bar, Barley's and Merchants of Beer, has pledged the initial \$200,000, and an anonymous donor is contributing another \$100,000.

Boyd also is organizing a music festival later this year, with proceeds going to the Fort Kid fundraising campaign. (More details on the festival to be announced in coming weeks.)

"It is the City's intention to partner with the community to reconstruct and enhance Fort Kid," Mayor Madeline Rogero said. "We're grateful to Thomas Boyd and other donors for stepping up to make Fort Kid the very best it can be.

"Fort Kid was created by volunteers. As the City repairs the footprint of the site, volunteers will once again be part of funding and designing an improved Fort Kid."

Boyd said he's excited about pulling people together for a unique and worthy community project.

“Fort Kid has always been a much-loved and central part of our downtown community,” he said. “Growing up in Knoxville and having gone to Fort Kid as a child absolutely helped develop not only my love of this playground, but also my love of our downtown. I can’t wait for my own child to experience this improved version of one of my favorite childhood memories!”

Butler similarly likes the idea of an improved Fort Kid that’s accessible to everyone and will offer better connectivity with the Museum of Art.

“Fort Kid is such a close neighbor, it’s practically an extension of the KMA,” the museum Executive Director said. “We’re excited that plans are moving along so well and look forward to helping however we can with the enhancement of this treasured community asset.”

The Fort Kid playground off World’s Fair Park Drive temporarily closed in November 2018 after a Knox County Health Department inspector responded to a citizen complaint and found a number of problems, such as exposed nails, trip hazards and splintered wooden components. The Public Building Authority over the winter made minor repairs to the City-owned playground, which reopened March 28.

Safety and accessibility are the two main issues being addressed in the Fort Kid upgrade. Currently, Fort Kid does not meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

The original retaining wall that supports the play area has decayed and must be replaced. Many of the wooden components of Fort Kid have aged and metal fasteners have rusted. Repairs and maintenance of the outdated play structure are challenging.

The City will replace the wall with a grassy sloped area. That work, expected to cost about \$300,000, will get underway late this year and will prepare the site for the reconstruction of Fort Kid.

Meanwhile, supporters of Fort Kid will be invited to share their ideas about the design and amenities they’d like to see at the new play area. A public charrette will be scheduled later this year.

With \$600,000 already in hand and more funds being raised, Boyd, Butler and Mayor Rogero are excited by Fort Kid’s potential.

The City and its partners hope to complete the fundraising and design work for the new play area by the time the site preparation begins and the playground is closed temporarily at the end of this year. Work on the landscaping and new amenities will begin once the grassy slope is in place.

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