

Taken from the magazine **Government Recreation & Fitness**, March 1998 issue



The Navajo Nation and Navajo people are unique among the more than 500 federally recognized Indian tribes in the United States, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Geographically, the Navajo Nation is comparable in size to West Virginia, encompassing nearly 27,000

square miles of reservation, tribal and private lands. It is spread throughout Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, and is the largest population, 13 percent of all American Indians, states the bureau. More than half of those people live in overcrowded housing that lacks running water and electricity, which makes for difficult living conditions.

Having the largest population means also having the largest number of children. "Kids need places to play, especially if space is limited indoors. This means having a need for state-of-the-art, safe playgrounds," says Amy Mathis, principal of Dlo'ay Azhi Community School, at Dlo'ay Azhi, Mathis's expressed desire for a new playground was realized earlier this year. "Our last playground," reports Mathis, "was installed 10 years ago. We decided to replace it because of safety concerns. The major concern with the new playground was avoiding anything made out of wood."

Beginning in late 1997, Mathis contacted Ramona Allison, business technician at the bureau's office in Crown Point, N.M. Allison then got in touch with Leisure Designs, a playground design firm in Scottsdale, Ariz.

"As a purchasing agent I am required to go out for competitive bids. We usually but through GSA contract, so that is where we go first. If that is not satisfactory, we then go to the open market, depending on budget concerns," explains Allison.

After choosing Leisure Designs, the school purchased a \$30,000 GameTime playground system. Approximately six weeks later the equipment was delivered to Hanson & Prezzano Builders, Peralta, NM Hep Prezzano, managing partner, then oversaw the actual installation of the unit, a nine day task.

In its completed form, the structure includes three slides (straight tube, tube loop and flip tunnel), two climbers (chain net and corkscrew), a ring trapeze, a horizontal loop ladder, a funnel bridge, a crow's nest and 12 separate decks.

Ground surfacing for the playground consists of 12 inches of 3/8-washed pea gravel that covers 2,250 sq. ft., meeting both Consumer Products Safety Council (CPSC) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) guidelines.

Also complying with the guidelines is the 100 sq. ft. of ADA-access surfacing that was installed. "The surfacing is Ampex rubber tiles glued on top of concrete slabs to provide handicapped accessibility," says Prezzano.

For the approximately 155 kindergarten through sixth graders at the school, the new playground means a safe place to play for at least 10 years, with the proper maintenance.

"In order to ensure the playground lasts, routine checks need to be performed," suggests Prezzano. Visual inspections for general wear, bolts loosening, etc., should be conducted at least once a week. The gravel in front of the slides, however needs to be checked every day and redistributed, if necessary, to avoid injury the following day.

"If something is caught early and addressed immediately there shouldn't be any problems. It shouldn't happen, but use has a way of naturally causing wear and tear. It's like a car, with proper maintenance it should last for a very long time," surmised Prezzano.

Keeping up with the maintenance on this playground is especially important because there are no replacement schedules for the equipment involved. "Because it was purchased as a system, replacing only one component or another could throw the whole unit out of whack," Prezzano explains. Since the project began, the greatest concern to Mathis and Prezzano alike is the mere existence of the playground. "These children have very limited facilities," laments Prezzano. "What's important is that they simply get to enjoy the playground."