

FROM THE EDITOR

The theme of this newsletter is modern landscapes motivating healthy living. Recent health reports document that the obesity crisis in the US has not leveled off and that current obesity policies have not had the desired effect. It is clear we need to do more. And we need better environmental interventions.

A child's health is powerfully shaped by the environment in which he or she lives, learns and plays. Both family and community matter. Three different approaches to high quality playgrounds will be featured in this issue: Manhattan Plaza, QuikTrip Plaza and Herron Park. However, they all share the same design principles: variety of interactive play activities, modern look, accessibility, compelling layout, and design components with both a natural and social focus.

Most gripping to me is how a mom in New York at the Manhattan Plaza describes what access to a fun recreational environment in her own neighborhood means for her quality of life.

Cheers,

Helle Burlingame

Director, KOMPAN Play Institute, NA

UPDATES FROM THE **KOMPAN PLAY INSTITUTE**

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HEALTH FINDINGS



Latest data on this nation's obesity rates point to the serious need for active playful environments.

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FEATURED PLAYGROUND: MANHATTAN PLAZA



Margaret Kelly, a resident of Manhattan Plaza, describes what a new playground means to her family.

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FEATURED PLAYGROUND: QUIKTRIP PLAZA



Keith Franklin, President of LandPlan Consultants, explains the design concept behind the new family play space at QuikTrip Plaza.

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FEATURED PLAYGROUND: HERRON PARK



Deborah Cahill, Architectural Project Coordinator, describes the positive effects of Herron Park's digital playground on the surrounding community.

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2009 KPI CONFERENCE SCHEDULE



Find out about a presentation in your area.

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The percentage of obese or overweight children is at or above 30 percent in 30 states. Nationwide, less than one third of all children ages 6 to 17 engage in vigorous activity.

HEALTH FINDINGS

Recent findings document the importance of creating landscapes that promote healthy living.

U.S. OBESITY PROBLEM INTENSIFIES — 2009

The percentage of obese or overweight children is at or above 30 percent in 30 states. Mississippi has the highest rate of obese and overweight children at 44.4 percent. Minnesota and Utah have the lowest rate at 23.1 percent.¹

OBESITY AND HEALTHCARE COST

Experts estimate that more than a quarter of America's health care costs are related to obesity. The US government has set a target of cutting obesity rates in all 50 states to 15 percent by next year. However, the report said that this target was certain to be missed.¹

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Sixty percent of Americans do not engage in the Surgeon General's recommended level of physical activity, while 25 percent are not active at all. Nationwide, less than one third of all children ages 6 to 17 engage in vigorous activity, defined as participating for at least 20 minutes in physical activity that made the child sweat and breathe hard.¹

OBESITY CAUSES

The causes of the current obesity epidemic are complex, with inadequate physical activity being a critical factor. What is preventing us? Parks and recreation spaces are not considered safe or well maintained in many communities.

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Health Findings, continued



In order to promote increased physical activity in urban parks, perceived and actual safety concerns must be addressed.

In order to promote increased physical activity in urban parks, perceived and actual safety concerns must be addressed.^{1, 2}

EVERY CHILD NEEDS A PLACE TO PLAY

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is working to provide safe places to play within a ten-minute walk of every child in New York City. They want to transform vacant school lots into vibrant playgrounds and community parks. The goal is to create more than 200 acres of safe, new parkland and provide neighborhood places for more than 380,000 children to play, exercise, and socialize with family and friends.³

HIGHER LEVELS OF FITNESS = BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A new report from the Health Department and the Department of Education finds that physical fitness is associated with higher academic achievement among New York City Public School students. Nearly 40 percent of New York City students are overweight or obese.⁴

1. F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America. 2009. Trust for Americas Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. [Download PDF](#)
2. Park Safety and Physical Activity. The Trust for Public Land. 2009. [Download PDF](#)
3. Every Child Needs a Place to Play. Parks for People – New York City Playground Program. The Trust for Public Land. 2009. [Download PDF](#)
4. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, June 2009, Vol 8, No. 1. [Download PDF](#)

Tiki Barber, former NFL running back and founder of Tiki Recreation, testing body and brain on the ICON Rocky in collaboration with kids at Manhattan Plaza.



MANHATTAN PLAZA: INNOVATIVE PLAYGROUND FOR ALL AGES

An interview with Margaret Kelly Murphy, resident and mother of three kids • Manhattan Plaza

My oldest has changed over the last year — he became much more sedentary. I was starting to worry about how to get him off the computer and exercising. Now he begs to go down to the playground. Thank you!

Tiki Recreation's most recent venture was revealed June 8th at Manhattan Plaza, with the grand opening of New York's first interactive electronic playground on 43rd Street. Manhattan Plaza is an affordable housing complex and home to more than 3,500 residents. Because of a partnership between Tiki Recreation, Related Affordable and KOMPAN Inc., the Plaza tenants received an incredible playground makeover. This involved a full renovation of equipment, surfacing, and landscaping that was completed in order to bring the children of Manhattan Plaza a playground and sports court unlike any other in the eastern United States.

So what's it like? KOMPAN and Tiki Recreation built a state-of-the-art, innovative playground for every age group. The digital playground equipment is the first of its kind on the East Coast

and represents the most advanced outdoor gaming system in the country. KOMPAN's ICON apparatus encourages children to be active by integrating digital games right into the equipment. The playground is also eco-friendly, made with recyclable materials and using the most sustainable practices. The KOMPAN Play Institute asked a family living at Manhattan Plaza to describe what the playground makeover has meant for the family's daily life.

What does it mean for your family's daily life to have a playground nearby?

We have three boys in a two bedroom apartment in the heart of Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan. Having a playground an elevator ride away has been such an amazing gift. I had been running my boys in

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Manhattan Plaza, continued



Above: "Lots of climbing provides chances for my eight-year-old to use his upper body," explains Margaret Kelly Murphy.

Right: Roz Coleman Williams, Coleman Williams, Declan Murphy, and Chris Murphy.



the hallways of the building when they needed to get out energy and we didn't have time to walk to a playground. Now we have this amazing backyard.

I love how open the playground is. I can see all three kids at the same time and don't have to spend all my time tracking lost children. Two neighbors of mine are confined to wheelchairs and for the first time, with the new ground covering, I saw them out and next to their kids as they played. It is quickly becoming a gathering place for the neighborhood as well as just our buildings.

I love that this playground has so much for not just my two- and four-year-olds, but also my eight-year-old. Lots of climbing provides chances for my eight-year-old to use his upper body. My oldest has changed over the last year — he became much more sedentary. I was starting to worry about how to get him off the computer and exercising. Now he begs to go down to the playground. Thank you!

Margaret asked each of her children what they thought of the new playground. Here is what they had to say:

GEAROD: EIGHT YEARS OLD

It's awesome! I really like the part with the lights because you have to go around and you never know which color will light up. If you play hide and seek there are a lot of places to hide.

DECLAN: FOUR YEARS OLD

I like everything about it and all my new friends I meet there. We had a big water fight down there. I like climbing on the climbing wall. I like climbing up the thing that twists — just everything in the playground, I mean everything.

LIAM: TWO YEARS OLD

I like turning round and round on the big round thing and the slide. *(Liam and his friends have been using the window on the bottom of the pirate ship as an ice cream shop.)*



QUIKTRIP PLAZA: THE PROMISE OF GREAT DESIGN LAYOUT

An interview with Keith Franklin, President • LandPlan Consultants, Inc. • Tulsa, OK



Video Link: Click on the image above to take a 3D tour of QuikTrip Plaza.

QuikTrip Corporation decided to commemorate its 50th anniversary in 2008 by giving back to the community. The goal was to design a signature plaza and playground as an innovative outdoor environment with unique, flexible space for children’s play, special events and all kinds of gatherings. An underlying concern of the initiative was to help children at risk and improve the quality of life in Tulsa. President Chet Cadieux of QuikTrip expressed it the following way: “Our theory is that if we can make some kind of difference in the lives of children today, then that will solve a lot of society’s problems in the next generation.” The plaza and playground were supported by other generous donors, including the George Kaiser Family Foundation.

What was the design layout goal for the play environment?

The design goal was driven by QT’s determination to provide a uniquely innovative play experience for children, coupled with a comfortable family friendly plaza/gathering area within the River Parks along the Arkansas River. QT approached the project with the intent of developing a landmark destination along Tulsa’s popular River Parks trail system that would provide a new benchmark for any future gathering areas planned along the length of the 22 mile urban trail.

LandPlan Consultants, Inc., collaborated extensively with members of QT’s management to reach a clear under-

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QuikTrip Plaza, continued



The design intent was to bring the river to the children through innovative high-play-value water elements in close proximity to cutting-edge playground equipment. Pleasant settings for adult supervision was an integral part of our plan — not a couple of benches placed as an afterthought.

standing of QT’s vision for the space. QT is well known for innovation in their own industry. This carried over into our design meetings, where QT never failed to keep the level of creativity high. The design intent for the children’s activity area was to bring the river to the children through innovative high-play-value water elements in close proximity to cutting-edge playground equipment. All of this was to be provided with an emphasis on family fun, so pleasant settings for adult supervision was an integral part of our plan — not a couple of benches placed as an afterthought.

What are the features of the playground and why?

QT was very involved with LandPlan in the selection of playground equipment. Again, their culture of creativity and innovation was apparent as we reviewed

our options. After a thorough evaluation of the various equipment available, our team unanimously decided to utilize KOMPANI’s GALAXY for the 5–12 age group and ELEMENTS for the younger children. The equipment was a unanimous pick, selected for its modern visual form and its proven play value. We were all excited to show the community a “new style of public play area.” KOMPANI representative Joel Rodell assisted with various layouts of equipment, which LandPlan looked at in various potential configurations to evaluate the relationship between the play fountains and the playground equipment.

The berms have been a treat since the concept was first suggested. Envisioned as a play element, the berms are large, elongated pyramidal shapes

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QuikTrip Plaza, continued



We placed five fountains in the play area with a sixth at-grade fountain located as a part of the plaza. We really let the creative juices flow when we came up with the play fountains — no pun intended!

covered in artificial turf. People have been very creative in their response to the berms. Sliding and barrel rolling seems to be the most common play activity...lying down and rolling to the bottom. I've seen people bring sheets of cardboard to engage in a little off-season "sledding."

The berms are placed to provide separation from the trail, and they quickly became a place for the adults and kids to lounge and observe the playground. They are so unique and visible from quite a distance, so they seem to lure folks in to see "what the heck?" The artificial turf surface keeps the maintenance simple and sweet...a leaf blower and you're done, in most cases.

What does the equipment accomplish?

The KOMPAN play equipment provides a striking first impression with its modern lines as people approach the plaza. It is sculptural, even when not in use, which is not often. The GALAXY and ELEMENTS groupings provide an excellent balance to the overall play area and provide a creative, active area for the kids. I get a real kick out of watching the adults give the GALAXY items a go, and so do their kids, judging from the laughter.

The KOMPAN play equipment and the fountains are centered in the play area together. No elevation change or barrier of any kind was designed in between the two, so there is a seamless transition between the water features and the play equipment. When the kids get tired of being wet and they see the kids having fun on the KOMPAN, they bolt over to the equipment. If they get

hot or see something exciting back at the fountains, they move that way. Then they might see one of their friends using one of the GALAXY twisters, and they are back to the playground equipment. My guess is the kids sleep well when they get home, and are ready for more the next day.

Explain the water features and why water is important in the play environment.

Bringing the river to the kids was an important goal of our design. People are naturally attracted to water, so the fountains are a key component to QT Plaza's success. With Tulsa's hot summers, water features can become a major attraction just for the cooling factor. The fountains are only going to be in operation between May and October, so the play area is designed to be fun and exciting even when the fountains are closed for the season. Then, when not operational, the fountains become an integral site element. We placed five fountains (Stepped Fountain, Lazy River, Bubbler Fountain, Arching Streams Fountain and Interactive Splash Pad) in the play area with a sixth at-grade fountain located as a part of the plaza. We really let the creative juices flow when we came up with the play fountains — no pun intended!

The fountains adjacent to the ELEMENTS product line are designed to be more accommodating to the 2-5 age group, with the fountains near the GALAXY 5-12 play equipment designed to be more active, to keep the attention of the older kids. And while we designed

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QuikTrip Plaza, continued



While we designed the play area for children, adults seem to thoroughly enjoy the activity with their kids. It is truly rewarding to us as designers to see our goal of a “family play area” so resoundingly well received.

the play area for children, adults seem to thoroughly enjoy the activity with their kids. It is truly rewarding to us as designers to see our goal of a “family play area” so resoundingly well received.

The play area looks very accessible — what were your thoughts on designing for accessibility?

Accessibility is always an important issue. Dealing with grade changes can make accessibility difficult, but fortunately this site didn’t have an incredible amount of grade change with its proximity to the river. We provided a barrier-free design in the play equipment areas, as well as the water play areas, to the highest degree possible. With “Family Friendly” at the top of our design goals, our plan required accessibility for the site to provide enjoyment for everyone in the family.

How do you use topography in your design layout and why is it important?

The location of the site on the banks of the Arkansas River, as well as its central location along 25–30 miles of multi-use trail, heavily impacted many of our grading decisions. We began with the plaza, which we designed as the highest point. The views across the river are amazing. We purposely placed the shelter here, overlooking the play area with easy access.

The plaza area has become the most popular outdoor gathering point in River Parks, with a multitude of users. We have fisherman making their way to the Arkansas River, disc golf enthusiasts accessing one of the newest, state-of-the-art disc courses in the state, and there is a nearby rugby field that sees heavy use year-round. Bird watchers,

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QuikTrip Plaza, continued



Play for all generations: Barbara Tartar awaits a spin from Tyler Kirchner. Both are associates of LandPlan Consultants.



The design team at LandPlan Consultants.

bicyclists, walkers, joggers, picnickers, young folks who want to hang and use the wireless, Friday night bands/concerts, the Tulsa Library providing story time for kids weekly, plus the many families who come just to enjoy the playground, water features and shade — the list goes on and on.

Accommodating accessibility for all these groups, providing separation from the trail and other safety and security decisions, making a visual statement at the intersection of 41st and Riverside Drive, as well as remaining true to our original goal of setting the benchmark for design in the River Parks system and creating a family friendly space, all of these things impacted our decisions on how to utilize or remake the existing topography.

The berms were a fun bit of “manufactured” topography that helped us achieve many of the objectives outlined above. The pyramidal, artificially turfed berms were conceived as an innovative visual separation between the dual multi-use trail and the play area. Functional as well as unique in appearance, the berms are utilized for play and for shaded seating by parents. On the west side of the playground we have a seat-height stone wall, as well as terraced turf areas that also provide comfortable and attractive seating for caregivers. We have planted numerous large shade trees in both areas, as well as preserving a 45-foot native green ash tree in the very center of the playground, which shades both the playground and berms.

We know from surveys and research that the perception of safety is important in park use. How is that accomplished in the QuikTrip Plaza project?

Safety is an important playground design consideration and we often find it a balancing act; integrating safety into innovative, exciting features is always a major challenge. Also, the perceived safety issue is normally combined with security issues, but they are distinct factors. Safety means not getting hurt while utilizing the space, equipment, features, etc. Security means not getting hurt by another individual meaning you harm. So, the public perception of this is a dual concern, which is handled differently and separately during the design. We provided poured-in-place safety surfacing under the KOMPAN equipment per code. We carefully analyzed other elements to address safety concerns as well. We provide for security by providing good sight lines throughout the design. Good sight lines generally limit hiding spots, provide visual access from the road and the periphery by law enforcement and others, and provide uniform lighting.



PLAYGROUND AT PHILADELPHIA'S HERRON PARK GOES DIGITAL

*An interview with Deborah Cahill, Architectural Project Coordinator
Department of Public Property • Philadelphia, PA*

This summer, kids in Philadelphia will have one more reason to go outside. The City of Philadelphia has installed the best in playground technology — KOMPAN's interactive ICON system. Herron Park is the latest in a series of cities across North America to bring their parks into the 21st century and feature playground equipment for today's digital generation. "ICON represents the future of outdoor play," explains KOMPAN, Inc. president Tom Grover. "Our mission is to make every park relevant for every child that wants to play. Playgrounds need to matter to a generation of kids born into the digital age. ICON accomplishes that and much more."

ICON is KOMPAN's latest innovation, featuring four different structures designed to get kids moving with lights, sounds and high scores. Philadelphia installed two of the four products, Space and Nova, each equipped with several games so kids can play solo or in

large groups. In addition to KOMPAN's ground-breaking ICON products are several KOMPAN favorites, including spring riders and the challenging Miram Skater. Herron Park has undergone a complete transformation and is part of the city of Philadelphia's initiative to update playgrounds throughout the city.

What do you think Herron Park does for the community?

It has galvanized the community. Entire families are enjoying the park. I've been to the site on many occasions, various times of the day. What really stands out is participation. The whole family is involved. I see fathers on ICON laughing with their kids. Moms enjoying the spray pools with their tots. Families picnicking under the tree canopies. There's an energetic, positive energy permeating the park. News has traveled, families from

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Herron Park, continued

Left to right: Sam LePera, Project Manager for Design and Construction, Department of Public Property, Philadelphia, and Peter Lawler, KOMPAN representative.



When a project is undertaken and the attitude by all involved is, “We will do the best we can and install top-quality equipment and material,” the end product reflects that attitude. At Herron, the public respects this playground.

different neighborhoods are coming to Herron. One woman wrote and stated she and some friends walked from their neighborhood to enjoy dinner at a local restaurant, then ambled over to Herron to see what the hype was all about. She loved it.

What stands out about the park to you?

Three items: landscape, playground equipment and aquatic spray features. Presently, when you enter Herron — native daisies, coneflowers and grasses are in bloom. The spring has flowering cherries, silverbells, redbud, dogwoods and viburnum. They are planted amongst the playground equipment. In the fall, native trees along the perimeter of the site are ablaze in gold, red and orange. Public spaces in urban sites need trees, shrubs and herbaceous materials. They become a place people go to for shade, relaxation — a respite.

KOMPAN’s playground equipment

looks like industrial art, sculpture, fitting perfectly into an urban space. It does not lie heavy on the site — instead it’s inviting and playful. As stated above, dads are playing along with their kids instead of observing from a distance. That I believe is the mark of success. The aquatic spray pools are timed in such a way as to promote game playing, while cooling kids off. Different colors, shapes and features of the spray heads dovetail perfectly with the KOMPAN pieces.

Just a side note: when a project is undertaken and the attitude by all involved — from designers to general contractors to subcontractors — is, “We will do the best we can and install top-quality equipment and material,” the end product reflects that attitude. At Herron, the public respects this playground. Trash receptacles are used, structures and plant material are not vandalized, a sense of ownership has been taken up by the community.

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Helle Burlingame

2009 KPI CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

This list will be updated as the year progresses.

CAEYC

California Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference
Sacramento, CA

Title: [The Four Seasons: A Scandinavian Childcare Center](#)

Title: [Designing Sustainable Play Experiences](#)

ECEBC

Early Childhood Educators of BC's Annual Conference
Richmond, BC

Title: [The Four Seasons: A Scandinavian Childcare Center](#)

APRA

Arizona Park and Recreation Conference
August 27 • Scottsdale, AZ

Title: [Reclaiming Outdoor Space for the Digital Generation](#)

Title: [Play Experience Deficit Disorder](#)

ORPA

Oregon Park and Recreation Conference
September 21 • Seaside, OR

Title: [Reclaiming Outdoor Space for the Digital Generation](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT KOMPAN PLAY INSTITUTE

The KOMPAN Play Institute is a network of international specialists in active outdoor environments for children and young people. We keep an eye on trends in society and look at how they affect children and teenagers and their playgrounds and outdoor spaces all over the world. We initiate research projects and collaborate with researchers internationally. Our goal is to share our knowledge for the benefit of children and young people as well as the adults who work in this field. We do this through seminars, conferences, articles and our website.