

# Allison Cassens' memory to live on in new Early Childhood Center playground

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Allison Cassens' memory is going to live on in children with a gorgeous new playground facility at the Allison Cassens Early Childhood Development Center thanks to a generous donation.

The Allison Cassens Endowment Fund provided the gift for the playground in front of the facility at 190 Cottonwood Road, Glen Carbon. The playground was dedicated Saturday morning. Allison died in 2004 at the age of 34 after a long battle with cancer. The center opened in 2012 and today has more than 70 children on hand each day for developmental learning.

On Saturday, Linda Cassens, Allison's mother, was on hand with Larry Wehmeyer of the endowment fund, to cut the ribbon at the Early Childhood playground and for people to tour the facility with an open house.

Linda said it was Allison's dream to help children grow up and it to be a better world and this playground donation is another way to help some meet that goal.

Linda Cassens said so many times as a child she was asked what she wanted to grow up and be and she would say, first, "I want to grow up and be happy." She said helping other children and carrying out some of Allison's dreams definitely makes her happy today.

“I want your children to blossom and be happy,” Linda told the group gathered at the dedication. “With Gary Niebur, YMCA executive director, and his staff here, we can make that happen.”

Niebur said Allison had a deep love and passion for early childhood development. She obtained her master’s degree in that field and truly loved children, he said.

“Allison’s passion was to take care of children and do whatever she could to make sure that every child was afforded the opportunity to learn at a very young age,” he said. “The marvelous story now comes full circle.”

Shortly after Allison’s death, her wish was that an endowment fund was established to help children.

“As we reflect back on Allison’s life and her love for children, we proudly reflect on the 50-year history of the Y providing preschool and childcare programs,” Niebur said. “In January of 2012 the Early Childhood Development Center opened with the mission of the YMCA and the importance of providing full day childcare services being the guiding force in the decision to renovate and open the facility to all.”

Crystal Andres, the director of the Early Childhood Center, said heading the facility is a dream come true for her and the playground will offer so much for children in the future.

Niebur said on Saturday the Allison Cassens Early Childhood Development Center serves over 75 children from infants to five-year-olds on a daily basis,” he added. “We have a lot to celebrate as we see many positive changes and improvements to the center and the services we provide thanks to the generosity of the Allison Cassens Endowment Fund.”













