



Children's Fairyland gains new performance venue

Construction begins for Aesop's Playhouse, which is expected to open next summer

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By Matthew Cooper

Children's Fairyland has been a haven for children's activities and arts since 1950.

But for years what many felt was needed at Fairyland was a suitable venue to host children's arts performances.

Thanks to Measure DD, a voter initiative to fund public parks in Oakland, the dream for a new theater is being realized. On Wednesday, ground was broken for a 215-seat, Greek-style outdoor amphitheater at the children's park. The venue, which is the first Measure DD project to break ground, will attract children's theater, dance and other arts groups after it opens in June.

The theater will be named Aesop's Playhouse, and will integrate themes and characters from "Aesop's Fables."

Aesop's Playhouse will bring a bigger venue than the existing Emerald City Stage at Fairyland, which only holds 60 people with flat benches and a troublesome concrete stage.

"The children were performing on a very small stage, dancing their hearts out on concrete," said C.J. Hirschfield, executive director of Children's Fairyland. "We wanted a better venue for all children's performing groups. We will attract many more children's arts groups in Oakland (with the new playhouse)."

The amphitheater will have a stage material more suitable for performing, a backstage area, lighting for night rehearsals and performances, and stadium-style seating.

The entrance will have Greek columns with the words "Aesopos dominar" at the front. The entrance path will lead into the arena, so onlookers can see the stage from the walkway. The stage also will have other Greek-style backgrounds depicting the "Aesop's Fables" theme.