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Grocery employees donate playground set to mission

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ARLINGTON - After today, the wooden play set - complete with a fort, slide, swings, ladders, and a knotted climbing rope - will be fully equipped to entertain children at Mission Arlington.

Several volunteers from area Kroger stores will treat the playground equipment with weather sealant this morning, said Greg Campbell, co-manager of Kroger on Ascension Boulevard.

The dark brown equipment, sitting at the south end of Mission Arlington's property, will be dedicated to slain Arlington third-grader Amber Hagerman.

The formal dedication will be in the spring when the weather warms. The volunteers from Kroger Associates Reaching Everyone hope to donate more equipment and cover the playground with wood shavings, Campbell said.

"They've got the only day shelter in Arlington, so they serve a wonderful purpose, and we decided to help them make a better place for the children," Campbell said.

"It's not a huge, expensive deal; it's just a simple, nice playground," he said.

KARE is a nonprofit group that, in Campbell's zone, includes Kroger employees from Arlington, Grand Prairie and some other Dallas County stores, he said.

Peggy Young, a file coordinator at Kroger on East Arkansas Lane, suggested that KARE make the donation.

"I know that Mission Arlington does good work," Young said. "What I would like to see KARE do is put a smile on the kids' faces who haven't smiled in a while. " A woman from Young's church found a Dallas family whose children had outgrown their play set and who wanted it to be available to many children.

Tillie Burgin, director of Mission Arlington, said the new play set is "bigger than anything we've ever had . . . I just couldn't believe it. " Barbara Webb, who works at the shelter, said the playground will come in handy. "This'll give the children something to play in and have fun in while their moms and dads work or look for work, which is our whole mission. " Amber, the child to whom the project is dedicated, was kidnapped in January 1996 while riding her bicycle in east Arlington. Her body was found four days later in a north Arlington creek bed. Her killer has not been found.

Shortly after Amber's death, her father, Richard Hagerman, asked that residents stop contributing to reward funds and instead donate to charities such as Mission Arlington or organizations devoted to children.

Donna Whitson, Amber's mother, said her daughter often visited Mission Arlington and enjoyed getting clothes and toys there.

Whitson said she was pleased with the donation. "I'm sure Amber's smiling too," she said.

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