

Nurture Your Condominium Community



◀ An attractive and fun playground enjoyed by the children, looking inviting and requiring little, if any, maintenance enhances pride of ownership and goodwill.

Condo Playgrounds: Why Have One?

BY TONY KELLY

PLAYGROUNDS perform two very important functions when situated in a condominium location. First and most obvious, it is a place for children to gather and play, a centre for children to easily meet others and welcome newcomers (parents and children), and a place to socialize and hangout with their friends. Second, the other, often forgotten, function of a playground (particularly one based in a condominium setting) is to enhance owners' property values and pride of ownership.

As a place for playing, playgrounds allow children to develop many different body skills, enhance hand-eye coordination, and develop muscles, balance and endurance. And when playgrounds are designed and built with the proper type of equipment, they help develop many interactive and socialization skills as they provide physical challenges that require interaction with other children, as well as being a catalyst for having contests,

chatting, laughing and generally hanging out away from traffic, distractions and other interruptions. Community-minded condominiums go even further and make the play area more than just a playground by adding walkways, trees, benches, picnic tables, and even barbecues to make it more of a park setting for whole families to gather together. Thus the playground becomes a central focus point for the condominium.

In terms of property value, playgrounds are one of the most cost-effective methods of increasing unit worth. When a new owner with children is evaluating potential residences, a bright, colourful and interesting play area will not only please the buyer but improve the selling price and make the sale many times easier. The other intangible benefit is pride of ownership. An attractive and fun playground enjoyed by the children, looking inviting and requiring little, if any, maintenance enhances pride of ownership and goodwill and



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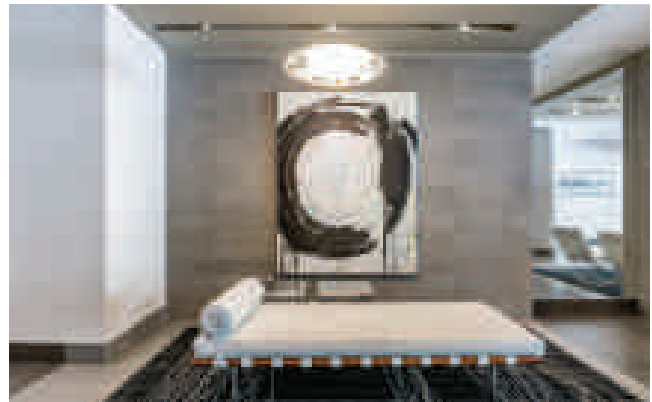
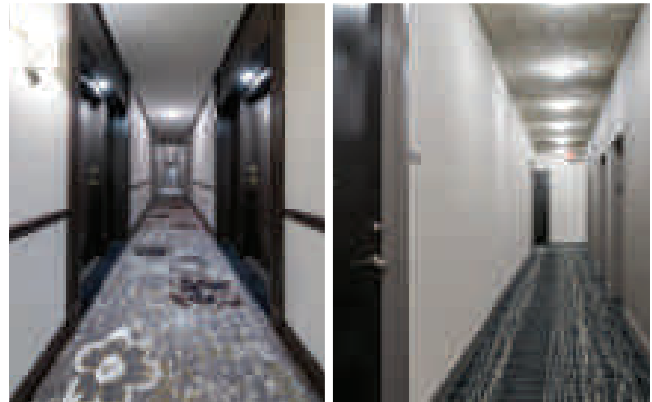


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makes for more satisfied and happier owners. Over the last few years, many condominium owners have taken out perfectly good but old, worn, dull-looking playgrounds and replaced them with new, bright, colourful units and because of this, have seen the directly related increases in property values they were expecting.

Keeping Safe

Of course, in any play area there are going to be accidents and some minor injuries and, unfortunately, this is normal wherever children are active and challenging themselves. In fact, in North America, there are over 200,000 children admitted to hospitals each year due to playground accidents (this includes playgrounds at home, school, parks, condominiums, commercial parks, etc.). Therefore, since playgrounds are a shared resource and hence owned by the condominium board, the risk factors and the safety of the children using it need to be taken into account. To this end, condominium organizations interested in installing playground facilities should ensure they are working with companies that follow the applicable guidelines outlined in the Canadian Standards Association (i.e. CSA Z614-14 covering playgrounds). This standard requires yearly, comprehensive, onsite inspections of the site with a follow-up, written report to ensure the playground is safe for use, meets current industry guidelines and shows due diligence on the part of the condominium corporation. These inspections are a very small price to pay (typically \$150 to \$350) for peace of mind, reduction in risk and legal due diligence. Besides the inspections, other simple and cost-effective risk management tools are: gating and fencing where appropriate, signs advising age requirements, parental supervision requirements, and detailing what to do and who to call in case of damage or broken equipment.

Condos versus Schools

A playground suitable for a condo is very often different than one installed at a school or park. In a condo, the playground needs to be rated so children of all ages (usually 18 months to 12 years) can make use of it. This holds true for



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all but the largest installations, where size and space allow for two different age-related playgrounds to be installed. For the majority, a multi-age-rated unit is put in place that provides for a range of equipment suitable for the different age groups. Another significant issue for condo situated playgrounds is maintenance. To ensure this is minimized as much as possible, most newly installed playgrounds are built from plastics and recycled rubbers and coated with enamels and finishes to last many years before any painting or repairs are needed. A third important factor is the kind of surface used in the playground. Older playgrounds built with peastone or sand bases often have problems associated with the dirt that gets carried into the buildings and individual units. Most building owners are very familiar with the ongoing cleaning and maintenance issues that can happen to carpets and floors (especially to those lovely marble floors) let alone the high cost of elevator door maintenance caused by sand and peastone stuck in them. With the availability and low costs of various wood fibres or even a non-maintenance, unitary surface like artificial grass or poured-in-place rubber, smart owners make maintenance related issues a thing of the past.

So, a little upfront planning and

discussions with an expert, can make playgrounds an asset versus a liability. They can easily improve the total landscape and appearance of the condo, enhance the value of the building and individual units, and provide a pride of ownership, a safe social environment and a fun place to play for years to come. While an old decrepit playground can cause dissatisfaction, lower property values, higher risk costs and unhappiness of the members, a great looking, well used and inviting playground can reflect on the board's ability to do a good job of managing the condo facilities and highlight the owners' commitment to the property. ♦



Tony Kelly is a Canadian Certified Playground Inspector who has been designing, installing and inspecting playgrounds in Ontario for over 25 years (and still sneaks a slide or two when nobody is looking).

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