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THEY'VE GOT GAME!

Kids in Brownsville roar their approval at the opening of the Imagination Playground on Linden Blvd. Below, a young boy makes like He-Man by using one of the playground toys as a makeshift barbell.



Kids (& their imaginations) run wild at awesome Brownsville playground

BY AYALA FALK

MOST SURPRISES come in a box, and for the children in Brownsville, their summer surprise came in a giant one.

The Imagination Playground is a giant box filled with blocks, cones, sprinklers and sand — all the tools a youngster needs to build his or her own ideal playground.

"I'm building a castle, and tomorrow, I'm going to build a spaceship," said gleeful Remel Isil, 6, before he scampered off to join his friends at the Brownsville Recreation Center playground.

Inspired by his own children playing, David Rockwell, an award-winning architect, created a playground where children will not only get their dose of outdoor activity, but will also stretch their imaginations and hone their creativity.

"Kids have this innate instinct to collaborate and play," said Rockwell. Imagination Playground provides kids with "the raw ingredients for creativity," he explained.

Rockwell teamed with nationwide playground creator, KaBOOM! and the city Parks Department to bring the special playground to Brownsville for the summer.

"When you do this for a community, you bring

down crime and bring up creativity," said Councilman Charles Barron (D-Brownsville).

After the ribbon on the very first Imagination Playground was cut, the kids from Brownsville Recreation Summer Camp began to think outside the box.

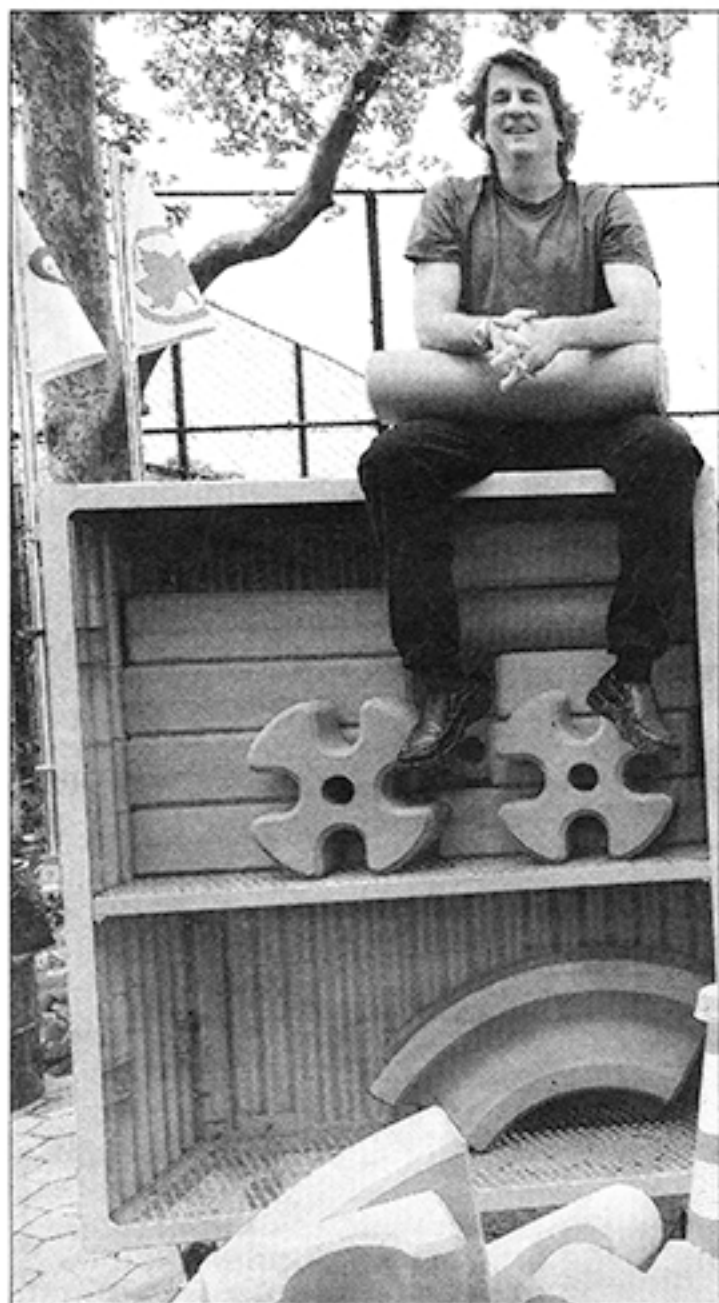
"I could be anything I want to be," said Say-quin Carlton, 11. "I want to be in the Olympics and do the long jump," he said, right before leaping over a practice stunt jump that he built out of big blue foam blocks.

The Imagination Playground will remain in the recreation center playground on Linden Blvd. until Labor Day. It will be open from 8 a.m. until dusk, and will be supervised by two play associates.

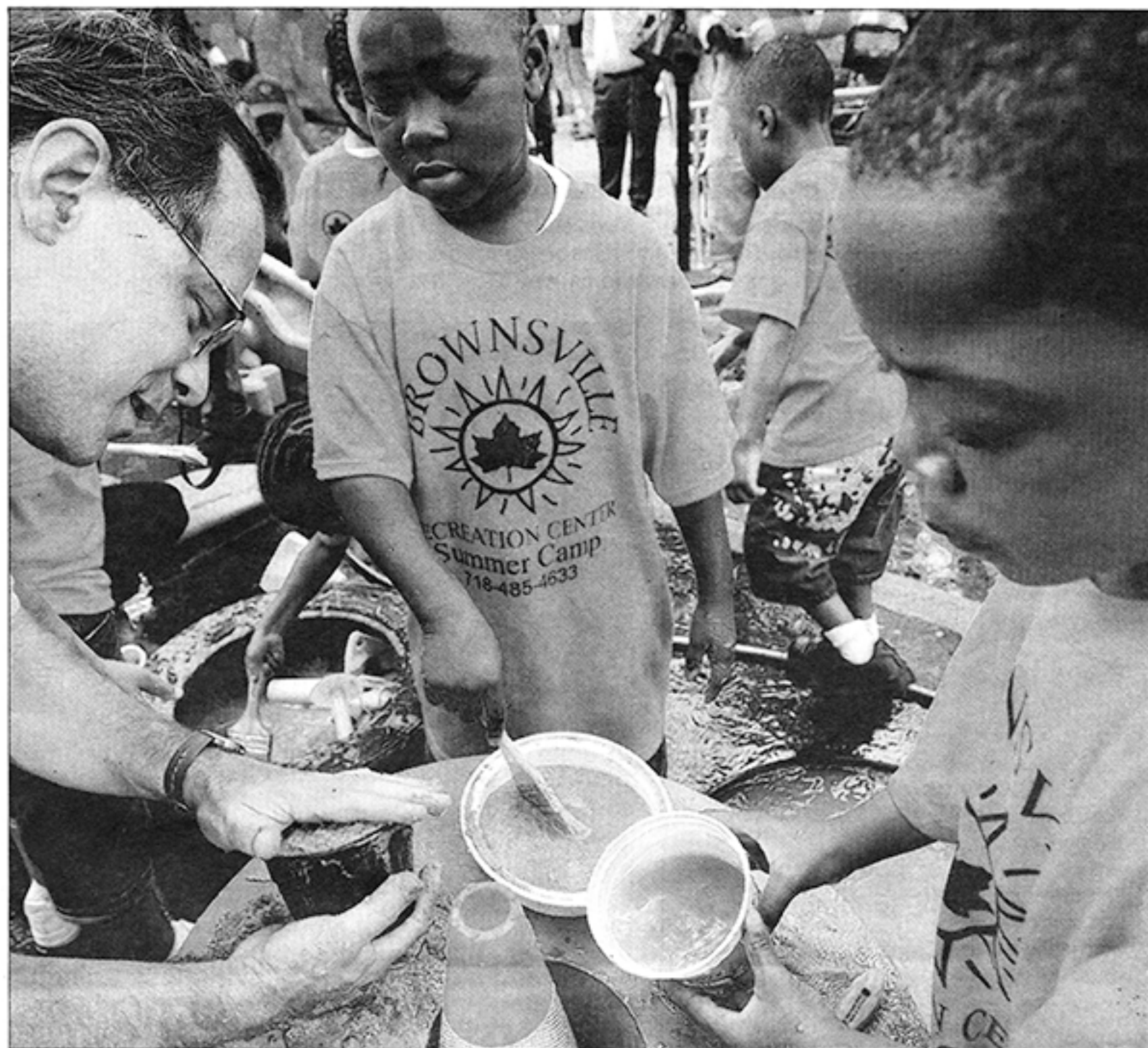
By next summer, the innovative playground should be in parks, schools and homes around the country, said KaBOOM! CEO Darell Hammond.

"Children outside New York should also have the opportunity to experience this child-initiated free play," Hammond said.

"It fulfilled everything that I thought it would," he marveled as he watched Iyanna Keith, 5, put the finishing touches on her looming blue tower.



David Rockwell, founder of the Rockwell Group, sits on one of the opened boxes of playthings at the opening of the Imagination Playground in Brownsville. He says he was inspired by his own kids to create the fun spot.



Photos by
LINDA ROSIER



This is how she rolls! Aniyah Beton, 10, rounds out things by creating her own unique mode of transportation. Below, kids from Brownsville Recreation Center Summer Camp decide a little relaxation is in order by creating their own rest area.

