

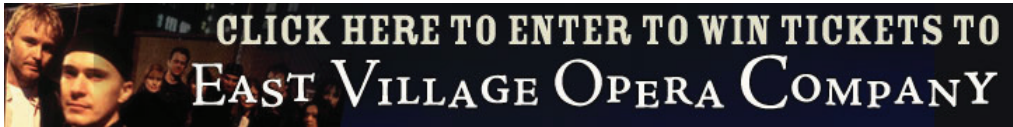
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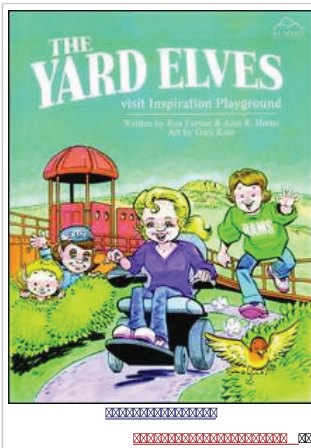
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Charitable Elves

Landscaper authors book on Inspiration Playground to help kids in need

Julie Piotraschke

1:05 a.m. MT Oct 7, 2007

The Yard Elves are perhaps best known in Fort Collins as landscaping designers for homes and businesses.

Now the able creatures and their creator are making the move to the children's bookshelf.

Fort Collins resident Alan Horne, the owner of Yard Elves, together with notable comic book writer Ron Fortier of The Hulk, Popeye and Green Hornet fame, have written The Yard Elves Visit Inspiration Playground."

The 42-page color book is about a group of magical elves, a brother and a sister, and their neighbors who come together to build a children's park.

The tale is woven around Inspiration Park here in Fort Collins, which is currently being built just south of Overland Trail and Drake Road. The \$1.35 million playground will accommodate children of all abilities. It is planned to open Oct. 27.

Horne, who founded Yard Elves about a decade ago, has been active in the funding of the park, but he was inspired to write after a visit to a Ronald McDonald House. When a relative had to have a leg removed because of cancer, Horne, with his wife Nicole, spent time visiting him at the Mayo Clinic.

Across the street was the Ronald McDonald House where Horne saw children who had lost legs or arms from cancer. It made a lasting impact.

So when the Yard Elves landscaping business became more successful than Horne anticipated — he started it out of his garage and has serviced 1000 satisfied customers since 1997 — and he knew how he wanted to make a difference.

A friendship with Craig A. Secher, president and founder of Realities for Children Inc., provided him with further motivation. And Fortier, who also is Horne's stepfather, provided an ideal writing partner.

Horne hopes the book will not only provide an amusing and moralistic tale for kids, but will also be a way to help children like the ones he saw years ago at the Ronald McDonald House.

Horne is donating all proceeds from the book to disabled children and at-risk youth in Larimer County. "I wanted to take something close to my heart and do something good about it," Horne said. "To me, that's true charitable giving. You want to be there for the community and to make a difference."

This book isn't the last chapter for the Yard Elves, rather it's the first in a series. Horne says the elves will appear in a book on cancer followed by one for burn victims. And after that, maybe a toy line too. Wherever the elves go next, Horne said they'll go where they'll help others.

"Our dream is to build a strong business and have enough revenue to reach children all over the world," Horne said.

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The book The Yard Elves Visit Inspiration Playground can be ordered for \$15.50 at lulu.com/content. Horne is hoping to have the book on the shelves of Barnes & Noble and B. Dalton in the near future. Horne can be reached at yardelves@gmail.com. All proceeds from the book will be donated to children with disabilities and at-risk youth.

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