



Jackson's Partnership Park fire drives 6-year-old girl to raise money to rebuild slide through lemonade stand

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J. Scott Park MLive.com

Akaysha Dempsey-Owens, 6, holds a sign as she tries to drum up business on Monday evening for her lemonade stand to raise money to replace the recently burned playground equipment in Partnership Park. She raised about \$100 in the sale. **9-12-12: Lemonade stand for Partnership Park** gallery (10 photos)

JACKSON, MI – Akaysha Dempsey-Owens was devastated to see her favorite playground in Jackson's Partnership Park destroyed by a fire last month. More than anything, the 6-year-old girl wanted to get her slide back, so she decided to do something about it. "She said, 'Can we just sell some lemonade or something so we can get the slide back?'" said Akaysha's grandmother, Wanda Beavers, a longtime resident of the Partnership Park neighborhood. "She kept asking every day."

Eventually, Beavers helped her granddaughter set up a lemonade stand near the park at Mason and Williams Streets to raise money for a new slide and to rebuild the park.

On Monday, the first-grader from Jackson Christian Elementary School made more than \$100 selling her lemonade to the neighborhood. Beavers said she thinks most people were giving more than the asking price of 25 cents per cup. "They thought it was so cute," Beavers said of the customers. "It was hard, but she made it (to her goal of \$100)."

A popular slide at the park caught fire Aug. 25. Beavers said the equipment at the park was installed three years ago and that the park is the cornerstone of the community. Grants keep the park going. "We've made the best of what we have," Beavers said. "A lot of children enjoyed that park." Police said two Jackson boys, ages 8 and 9, came forward and said they were playing with a lighter in Partnership Park around the time of the fire. The investigation has since been sent to the Jackson County Prosecutors' Office to determine if charges will be filed.

Beavers estimates that rebuilding the park will cost about \$20,000. She hopes community members will help the low-income neighborhood rebuild the playground.

"Someone will come along and help us," she said. "It's going to happen, and I want it to happen before the winter. We're working on it for the kids."

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