

10BEST: Seriously cool playgrounds

A new breed of playground welcomes kids of all ages — and abilities. “It’s not just about a swing set and monkey bars anymore,” says **Sara Moore**, who works with EarlyChildhoodEducationZone.com, a resource for parents and educators. Parks now include rock walls and climbing structures, and they often accommodate kids in wheelchairs and with sensory issues. Indeed, many have been built by volunteers in honor or memory of children with disabilities. Moore shares favorites with **Larry Bleiberg** for USA TODAY.

**RIVERVIEW PARK
MESA, ARIZ.**

Playground action here centers on a giant 50-foot climbing tower that will hold up to 250 people at the same time, the largest of its type in the world. There’s also a 60-foot-long caterpillar mesh rope climbing structure. “They’re looking for ways to help kids increase their coordination and balance. It’s an opportunity to try something new,” Moore says. The park sits next to the Chicago Cubs’ spring training facility. mesaaz.gov

**POSSIBILITY PLAYGROUND
PORT WASHINGTON, WIS.**

Thirty specialized pieces keep kids busy at this Lake Michigan-front park north of Milwaukee. Options include a spinning motion platform, a climbable pirate ship and a rain wheel showing how water is recycled through the park. The musically inclined can bang on an alligator-shaped drum. possibilityplayground.org

**LIONS PARK PLAYScape
GREENSBORO, ALA.**

Auburn University’s cutting-edge Rural Studio architecture program designed this one-of-a-kind playground using 2,000 steel drums that once held mint oil. The project, located in one of the country’s poorest regions, includes a skate park funded by the Tony Hawk Foundation. “This is one of the most unique places. How cool is it to be able to run through steel drums and look up and see them all around you?” Moore says. ruralstudio.org/projects/lions-park-playscape

**TAYLOR’S DREAM
BOUNDLESS PLAYGROUND
FORT WAYNE, IND.**

Kids are seamlessly sorted into play areas geared for different age groups and activities at this Midwest park. The Beta Pod area includes a crawl-through T-Rex skeleton, while the Gamma Pod focuses on storytelling, role-playing and social interaction. There’s even a gliding rocker that accommodates wheelchairs. “It’s laid out so kids naturally find their place,” Moore says. fortwayneparks.org

**SMOTHERS PARK
OWENSBORO, KY.**

Water plays a big role at this huge downtown park with fountain shows, a waterfall and Ohio River views from swings. A 30-foot elevated walk offers a route through trees inspired by the city’s record-size sassafras tree, and a splash area offers a chance for cooling off. “It’s so expansive, the kind of place I’d like my kids to see,” Moore says. owensboroparks.org

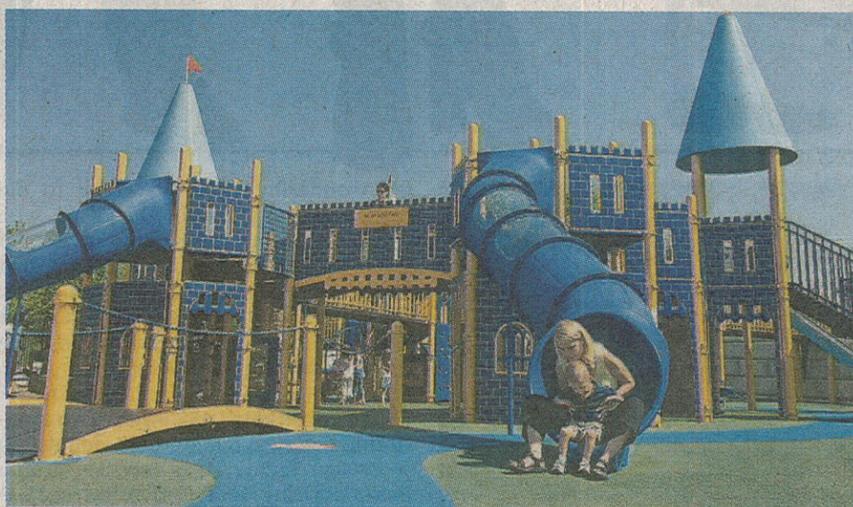
**JAKE’S PLACE
CHERRY HILL, N.J.**

At this highly inclusive park, named for a child who died of a rare heart condition, kids can access all the equipment with wheelchair-friendly bridges and tunnels, and even ramps leading up to slides. “This an awesome facility for kids with physical limitations,” Moore says. There’s ample seating, so parents can take a break, too: “They can sit back and watch and not hover.” buildjakesplace.org



Climbing, coordination and balance reach new heights at Riverview Park in Mesa, Ariz.

MESAAZ.GOV



LAKESAINTLOUIS.COM

**ZACHARY’S PLAYGROUND
LAKE ST. LOUIS, MO.**

Named for a child with a rare genetic disorder, this park places a high emphasis on inclusion, with Braille activity boards and even swings built for easy access. Kids are encouraged to make a racket in a music section with a xylophone and other outdoor all-weather instruments. “There’s also a castle and boat theme to encourage imaginative play,” Moore says. lakesaintlouis.com

**TATUM’S GARDEN
SALINAS, CALIF.**

Kids can learn about farming and sustainability at this park in area with a rich agricultural history. The fully accessible playground, named for a girl with spina bifida, has a virtual vegetable garden along with a quiet corner for visitors with sensory issues. “It was an old parking lot turned into a community park. It’s just a gorgeous place,” Moore says. tatumsgarden.org

Imagination, inclusion and accessibility are the watchwords at Zachary’s Playground in Lake St. Louis, Mo.

**SCIOTO AUDUBON
COLUMBUS, OHIO**

Moore regularly takes her kids to this park along the Scioto River, which offers views of downtown Columbus from a giant water tower. Other offerings include hiking trails, a nature center and an obstacle course for both kids and adults. “Everyone can play,” she says. metroparks.net

**HARRY THOMAS SR. PLAYSPACE
WASHINGTON**

This imaginative park in Northeast Washington focuses on science, art and architecture. The design is based on the Fibonacci mathematical sequence, a pattern found in nature in which each number is the sum of the previous two numbers. “It’s very educational, yet the kids are still at a park and they’re playing,” Moore says. “So often parks like this are in the suburbs, not in the middle of a city.” dpr.dc.gov

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