

# The Celebration in The Trees

## *A Spirit of Alexandria Project*

By Chelsea Nolan

The idea for The Treehouse was born years ago, with Alexandria's desire for a magical spot high above the ground, surrounded by nature. On Saturday May 7th, 100 people came to celebrate the unveiling of the 7,000 square foot structure that will provide countless children an opportunity to feel the magic of a house in the trees.

Leading up to the Grand Opening were months of planning, construction and love poured into this 20 ft. high installation. The finished product is a place where children and adults alike can explore decks and bridges, and learn from the educational material provided in the covered house. Venture to the land below the treehouse and find a swing which, just ask Jim Bartel, is fun for all ages.

On that beautiful Saturday in May, following a ribbon cutting by Spirit of Alexandria co-founder Jim Bartel and Director of Wildlife and Outreach for Howell Nature Center Dana DeBenham, the crowd rushed the treehouse with enthusiasm and excitement. To see adults, men and women of all ages, alongside their children, all laughing and jumping up and down on a suspension bridge is an experience only a space as whimsical as this could provide.

The Treehouse needed a bit of art, so each child was asked to paint a masterpiece on a block of wood to be added to the walls. The main event - for the kids, at least - was a duck race down the Nature Scape water feature, located just feet away from the Treehouse. Each child got to pick their favorite rubber duck, from unicorn ducks to ducks with tiger stripes. A lively race down the winding waterfall provided tough competition, and for those of us watching, endless entertainment.

The final piece to the Treehouse is, as seen below in the arms of Bartel, a cut out of a little girl on a swing. Spirit of Alexandria Vice-President, Craig Bennett, was in a race car accident weeks before the Grand Opening. This tragic turn of events unfortunately prevented Leah Bennett, President, and Craig from being able to attend this event. It was decided that when Craig, still wheelchair-bound and in recovery, is ready and able to walk he and Leah will place the little girl on the swing below the sign of the Treehouse to forever sway in the wind. When you visit The Treehouse you will see her

in her magical spot, high above the ground, surrounded by the nature she loved so much.









