

Students help to envision memorial playground, park for Lillard sisters

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Butterfly gardens, a stained-glass carousel and color-coded flower boxes were among the ideas pitched by high school students for a memorial garden planned in Frederick.

Proposals from five groups of more than 40 first-year students in the ACE mentoring program were presented Wednesday to the family of Sophie and Madigan Lillard, who are planning a memorial park to honor the sisters who died in a house fire near Myersville in 2013.

The 10-acre park planned at the site of the current VFW golf course on U.S. 40 along the Golden Mile is in the early stages of planning and development. It has received support from the city of Frederick, where officials voted to establish the park and approved a conditional master site plan.

A nonprofit organization formed to fund the park, called Sophie & Madigan's Playground, has raised almost \$300,000 for the park project so far, said Chrissi and Jack Lillard, the girls' parents.

The group became involved with the ACE mentoring program through Kendra Sullivan, who is Facebook friends with Chrissi.

The ACE program, which stands for architecture, construction and engineering, mentors high school students and inspires them to pursue careers in design and construction.

“I think the Lillards really liked the idea that students were playing, learning and creating to help them with their project,” said Sullivan, who is a mentor for the program. “The students are really thinking out of the box and they're really innovative and that's what the Lillards are looking for. They want this to be a special park. They want it to be a destination.”

Students have to apply to be part of the program and there are 43 first-year students from 10 high schools this year.

The student teams met multiple times a week since the fall and gave final presentations to the Lillard family, their supporters and employees at Bechtel, the primary source of mentors in



Sophie and Madigan

Kylan Connolly, a Linganore High School junior, presents his team's design for a playground to be built in honor of Sophie and Madigan Lillard.

Frederick County, on Wednesday evening. Apart from the presentations, the students also had to complete 11 “deliverables” including plot plans, utility plans, environmental impact reports, budgets and models.

They met with the Lillard family in the winter to learn more about Sophie and Madigan and their hopes for the park.

“This has been a really humbling and inspiring experience for all of us,” Sydney Garwood, a senior at Linganore High School, said during the presentation by her team, Dream Builders. “The day the Lillard family came in was the day we realized we could really make a difference with this project.”

The student proposals added to the family's vision, including ideas such as a community vegetable garden, clothing collection centers for children in need, annual events and a dog park.

“It's really cool to see how similar some of the ideas were, but how each team brought their own unique ideas to it,” Jack Lillard said at the end of the presentation. “We're truly, truly impressed.”

The family will receive copies of the students' complete reports, parts of which will be included in their future plans, Chrissi Lillard said.

“I love that it's the community working on the park. It just feels like the right thing to do,” Chrissi Lillard said.

Jill Crone, coordinator of the ACE stewardship program for Bechtel, said she hoped the students learned career skills and the value of volunteerism through the project.

“Hopefully, you as students have seen the power of giving back,” she told the teams.