



Calusa Play Park at Mediterra in North Naples is designed to give children and adults an understanding of the earliest inhabitants of Southwest Florida. *Courtesy/Gravina, Smith & Matte*

Calusa Play Park unveiled at Mediterra

Plans have been unveiled for an interactive historical play park at Mediterra, the 1,697-acre community being developed by The Bonita Bay Group in North Naples.

"Calusa Play Park presents an opportunity to learn about the history and culture of the Calusa tribes," said Ellin Goetz, landscape architect with Goetz & Stropes Landscape Architects and designer of the park. She explained that the park is designed to give children and adults an understanding of the earliest inhabitants of Southwest Florida who established coastal villages here more than 3,000 years ago.

"Calusa Play Park will be the second of six neighborhood parks planned for Mediterra," said Susan Hebel Watts, vice president of The Bonita Bay Group and general manager of Mediterra. "The park will have several distinct areas and each contains whimsical play elements that tie to Florida history, both natural and cultural."

As visitors enter the park they will first arrive at the Calusa Play Village, an introduction to the Calusa culture with play elements constructed in the images of a sea turtle nest and alligator. As they proceed through the park they will discover an active play area with grassy play hills and play equipment, a basketball half court, a boardwalk overlooking a wetland prairie that provides interpretive instruments for "swamp collecting," and a

story-telling circle designed with a raised seat-wall and a low bonfire pit to be a setting for listening to stories and participating in other activities.

One of the highlights of the park will be a Kids' Dig archeology area, with a replica of a shell mound with a cutaway that reveals "fossils" and a saber tooth cat "skull." This area will allow kids to dig and discover historically rooted artifacts that have been added to enhance the excitement. The Calusas constructed shell-and-earth mounds that they used to build ceremonial structures and villages that were insulated against rising tides.

"Interpretive displays tell a story along the pathways, bringing both children and adults an understanding of Calusa life and the natural environment they enjoyed," Goetz explained. "The attention to historic details, such as a fossil trail of animal prints and a gentle rise of crushed shell and earth, will add a richness typically absent from more traditional park settings. We will be adding final touches to the authenticated elements as the park plans are finalized, and we feel confident that the entire park experience will charm adults and add a fun play experience for children."

The sales center is located at the entrance to the community on Livingston Road, two miles north of Immokalee Road.