

SAFETYVILLE, USA OPENS DOORS TO HELP PROTECT KIDS

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As a marching band passed by and a burst of colorful balloons flew into the air, Safetyville, U.S.A. officially was put on the map Wednesday evening.

Several hundred people paid \$35 each to attend the grand opening of the five-year project - a miniature community designed to teach elementary school children how to deal safely in daily situations.

The community could be Anytown, U.S.A. with its church, school, fire station, railroad station, telephone company, shopping mall and gas station. But the tiny town also has a combined Capitol-courthouse building, the only structure that visitors can enter.

Kenneth Brown, of the Sacramento Safety Council that developed the community, said learning about safety is important because accidents are the leading cause of death of people from 1 to 44 years old.

The purpose of Safetyville is to teach children safety, said Brown. If one picture is worth a thousand words, doing it is worth a thousand pictures. When the kids get the chance to participate in the actual process - push the button to cross the street - it's a more meaningful experience for them.

Sue Clark, who brought her three children to the opening, agreed that practice would be good for children. Clark said she had discussed safety with her children, but that her information would be reinforced if they went through the Safetyville program.

At the 75-unit community built to one-third scale, children will learn how to safely cross sidewalks and bicycle on city streets. They will also learn to recognize and obey traffic signs, report fires and other emergencies using the 911 emergency phone number and avoid potential child molestation situations.

Although the miniature safety centers are not common in the nation, they have been in operation in Europe for many years, Brown said.

The children who participate have 89 percent fewer injuries than kids who do not participate, Brown said.

Beginning in mid-October, children within a 50-mile radius are scheduled to visit the facility with their classes, Brown said. Third-grade students will be the first to attend the 2.5-acre village located at 3909 Bradshaw Road.

Although the program is geared for classes, parents who want to bring their children may make a special request, Brown said.

The total cost of the project is between \$1.2 million and \$1.3 million, Brown said, with \$600,000 still owed.

The project is not being financed by taxpayers, Brown said, but is supported by donations from individuals, businesses and industries.

Businesses rent the various units for \$10,000 to \$30,000 on a five-year lease, Brown said. Units are still available for 30 more companies, he said.

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