

TOP STORY

## Brownsville hosts grand opening of Cast Iron Amphitheater

By Frances Borsodi Zajac fzajac@heraldstandard.com May 23, 2017 Updated 56 min ago



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State Rep. in the 50th District Pam Snyder, says how proud she is to represent Brownsville in her district looking at what the community has accomplished with the Cast Iron Amphitheater in Snowden Square. Snyder along with several other guests spoke during the grand opening Friday afternoon.

cattered showers failed to dampen the enthusiasm of those attending the ribbon-cutting and grand opening of the Cast Iron Amphitheater in Brownsville's Snowden Square.

"We see this community can aspire to make a dream come true," said Dr. Philip Savini Jr., superintendent of Brownsville Area School District.

More than 100 people appeared for the ceremony held Friday, exactly one year after groundbreaking for the \$300,000-plus facility, which features an outdoor stage and green space that includes a lawn, trees, bushes, paved walkway and benches.

The crowd included former and current members of the Brownsville Area High School's Students In Action team, who were the impetus for the creation of this community park.

With chemistry teacher Kelli Dellarose as their adviser and support from Savini and the school board, the students formed SIA during the 2011-12 school year and soon decided on the amphitheater project in Brownsville's downtown.

They partnered with the Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County and Brownsville Borough Council and worked with local organizations, nonprofits, elected officials, civic leaders and businesses to make it a true community effort.

Friday, the community gathered to recognize the SIA team as they formally opened the amphitheater.

Mayor Lester Ward told the crowd, "Let's have a big applause for the students" and proclaimed it Students In Action Day.

State Rep. Pam Snyder, D-Jefferson, presented a certificate to the youths, pointing out, "They had a vision, and they've seen it through."

State Sen. Pat Stefano, R-Bullskin Township, told the students, "What you have done is light the spark that will rejuvenate this community."

Carl DellaPenna Sr., president of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, made a presentation to the students and also remembered the late Frank Ricco, former chamber president, and his enthusiasm for this project, saying of the park, "It makes Brownsville a more beautiful town."

Jack Lawver, Brownsville Borough Council president, presented a plaque to the students from the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs.

Recalling the beginnings of SIA, Lawver noted the students were set on taking on a project in the downtown because "when people ride past, they can see the students of Brownsville can make a difference."

Savini stated, "I truly believe in our students and what they can do."

Many speakers, including the students, thanked Dellarose for her efforts in guiding the project.

Dellarose, in turn, thanked the community and individuals, such as Andrew French of the redevelopment authority and Terry McMillen of McMillen Engineering.

Calling all former and current SIA members up to the stage for acknowledgement, Dellarose explained the group didn't realize the impact they would make when they came together in 2011.

"Their focus was to change the morale of the area. They wanted everyone to have positive thoughts of the school and community," she said. "We couldn't have accomplished that goal any better."

Christian Sesak, a senior at Duquesne University who is an original SIA member, explained, "We wanted to do something that would truly impact Brownsville."

He thanked current students for picking up the torch and commended his fellow original members, saying, "We did it!" before launching into his own rendition of Sinatra's "My Kind of Town" by changing the words to Brownsville.

Kourtney Polvinale, another original SIA member and Thiel College graduate, said, "My most precious memories and favorite human beings are in this area. Today as we celebrate, we share a love of this town."

Many current students took part in the ceremony, including Lanieta Waqanivalu, who served as master of ceremonies; Jayda Jones, who sang the national anthem; members of Brownsville Area High School Band and BAHS musical cast, who performed selections from this year's "High School Musical."

The Rev. Timothy Kruthaupt, pastor, The Historic Church of St. Peter, offered a blessing and observed that he has spoken of the work of these students to inspire others.

Organizers hosted a launch of red and black balloons and then gathered students and officials, including Fayette County Commissioners Vincent Vicities and David Lohr, to the stage for the ribbon-cutting.

Blended Reality band closed the program with spectators invited to stage to enjoy the music and other activities.

Waqanivalu noted, "Thanks to all of you. It's not the best weather, but we want to thank the community for staying with us and making this day memorable."



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Brownsville resident Ronette Woods cheers for her granddaughter, Jayda Jones, after she sings the National Anthem during the ribbon cutting and grand opening of the Cast Iron Amphitheater in Brownsville's Snowden Square on Friday. Woods says she is so proud of her granddaughter Jayda, who is one of several students involved in the Students in Action team that made the park a reality.

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Brownsville High School faculty member and Students in Action advisor Kelli Dellarose hugs student Alexandria Seto during the grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony in Brownsville's Snowden Square on Friday.

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Brownsville High School faculty member and Students in Action adviser Kelli Dellarose recognizes the students involved in SIA during the ribbon-cutting and grand opening of the Cast Iron Ampitheater in Brownsville's Snowden Square on Friday.

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Brownsville students and community members gathered for the grand opening of the Cast Iron Amphitheater in Brownsville's Snowden Square on Friday.



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Brownsville Mayor Lester Ward addresses the crowd in attendance of the grand opening of the Cast Iron Amphitheater in Snowden Square, declaring the day Students in Action Day on Friday.

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Brownsville Area High School students and Students in Action members Jayda Jones (from left), Alexandria Seto, Jakob Sabatula, Jaden Harvey and Salanieta Waganivalu shield themselves from the rain during the ribbon cutting ceremony and grand opening of the Cast Iron Amphitheater at Brownsville Snowden Square in Brownsville on Friday.

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