

# People for Parks

## Little Guy, Big Dreams

A 4-year-old who lost his father in the West, Texas, explosion raises more than \$100,000 to rebuild the destroyed city park in his honor

By Danielle Taylor

The massive explosion at the West Fertilizer Company this April both literally and figuratively rocked the small community of West, Texas, which lost 15 people from the town and surrounding area in the disaster. In addition to the damage to dozens of homes and schools, one of the hardest-hit spots was the community park, located directly across the street from the fertilizer company.

City secretary and volunteer firefighter Joey Pustejovsky was one of the first responders who arrived on-scene to fight the initial fire. When the blast went off, he and 10 other emergency personnel lost their lives, leaving behind hundreds of friends and family members, including Pustejovsky's 4-year-old son, Parker. Prior to his death, Joey and Parker spent a lot of time playing together at the park, which is located one block from Joey's parents' home. As city secretary, Joey had attempted to secure grant money to update the park, but funds from the state had dried up, leaving the project on hold at the time of the tragedy.

A few weeks after the explosion, Parker asked his grandparents, Joe and Carolyn Pustejovsky, to take him to see what was left of their home. Afterward, as they were driving back through town, Parker piped up from the backseat.

"He said, 'Gigi (his name for Carolyn), I have a project I want to do. I'm going to raise money to rebuild the park,'" Joe says. "We just looked at each other. My wife asked him, 'How are you going to raise money?' He said 'I'm going to sell hot dogs.'"

Joe and Carolyn mentioned Parker's idea to several friends and neighbors, and the project quickly took off with lots of attention coming through the group's website and Facebook page.


Donations began pouring in for the July 20 event, including hot dogs from a local sausage company, chips from Frito-Lay and sodas from Dr Pepper.

In addition to the \$5 hot dog platters, the event featured a silent auction, CDs and T-shirts for sale, inflatable slides, a tribute to the fallen firefighters and more. People came out in droves, bringing not only money for the fundraiser but donated hot dogs and buns as well. Shermco Industries donated \$21,000 at the event, and \$45,000 came from the Texas Farm Bureau.

By day's end, about 2,500 hot dogs had been sold, and the total raised came out to \$83,000, an amount that stunned the event's organizers. Joey Pustejovsky was born on August 3, 1983, at 8:03 a.m., weighing 8 lbs., 3 oz., and the total amount raised confirmed to the organizers his presence that day.

Since the fundraiser, the project has received about \$20,000 more in donations, and more events are planned to continue raising support for the park. A number of contractors have also volunteered their services when the city is ready to begin building.

"It's time," Mayor Tommy Muska says. "We're still looking at fixing streets and sewers and water, but I think for the city to start the rebuilding process and the healing process, we've got to move forward with this as well."

For more information, visit [www.parkersparkproject.com](http://www.parkersparkproject.com) or [www.facebook.com/ParkersParkProject](http://www.facebook.com/ParkersParkProject). 

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The center of the explosion was located less than 200 feet from West's city park.