

## This Isn't Just Another Playground School dedicates therapeutic playground to late state Rep.

By **Marci Elliott** DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Ian Ross is only 2 years old, but he knows what he likes about the new playground at Gretchen Everhart School.

"The bikes. The slides. The trucks," Ian said in his 2-year-old manner.

Jaylinn Jenkins, 5, knows what she likes about it, too.

"I like it because I can climb on the monkey bars and ride the bikes and slide down the slide," Jaylinn said. "I like to make birthday cakes in the sand and climb on that big thing over there."

The big thing she referred to is called Thunder Mountain, and it's part of the new therapeutic playground that was officially dedicated Monday afternoon in memory of the late state Rep. David Coley of Marianna. David Coley was an advocate for children with special needs.

The playground was

designed primarily for younger children who have special needs and challenges that other kids don't have.

"This isn't just another playground," Principal

playground will encourage children to use muscle groups they haven't used before.

"Our children have all different abilities," Long said. "About one year



*Ruben Rowe III, President of Southland Contracting Incorporated, joins State Rep. Marti Coley, Leon County Superintendent Jackie Pons, and State Rep. Dennis Baxley*

Diane Brown told a group of about 30 dignitaries and guests. "This is a therapeutic playground that will make a difference in these children's lives."

Pre-kindergarten teacher Dawn Long explained that the different parts of the

ago, a lot of people got together to make this new playground possible."

Long told about Thunder Mountain and all the activities it offers: a big climbing "rock," a set of stairs with guard rails, two kinds of slides, a yellow "coil" that kids can slide down, a tunnel

and other fun parts. There are all kinds of tricycles and bicycles of difference sizes, "Flintstone"-type cars fueled by foot power, and a covered sandbox with a picnic table.

Everything in the playground has a purpose, even the wood chips that cover the ground.

"The wood chips require the kids to use different muscles to ride their bikes and cars," Long said.

State Rep. Marti Coley, who replaced her late husband as the legislator who represents Jefferson, Leon, Wakulla, Gadsden and Liberty counties - said it was an honor to have the playground dedicated in his memory.

"Schools like this are so vital," she said. "It is truly an honor and a privilege to have my husband's name associated with this."