

SEVEN DAYS

Tree-for-all

The death last week of actor and activist Christopher Reeve was mourned by millions of people around the world, including some Burlington folks who credit him for getting their own dream off the ground. Reeve and his wife Dana were scheduled to visit Vermont this week for the grand opening of the world's first universally accessible tree house, which was just completed in Burlington's Oakledge Park.

The arboreal structure was the work of Forever Young Treehouses, a 4-year-old Burlington nonprofit organization that designs, funds and constructs wheelchair-accessible tree houses for schools, camps and community groups. The group has built seven other tree houses for disabled people in five states, including one in New Hampshire that was funded by the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation. The Oakledge Park tree house is the first of its kind built on public land that will be truly accessible to everyone.

The 500-square-foot facility, which was partially funded by a \$25,000 grant by the City of Burlington, stands about 20 feet off the ground and is accessible by a 100-foot, gently sloping ramp. The wood and steel structure was built to support the weight of mechanical wheelchairs like the one Reeve used, which can weigh as much as 400 pounds.

Reeve's death at age 52 is "a big loss," says Dan Feeney of Forever Young Treehouses. "But we do believe that he'll be remembered as a person who did more since he became disabled than he did as Superman." The Oakledge tree house will be dedicated next Thursday, October 28.

KEN PICARD

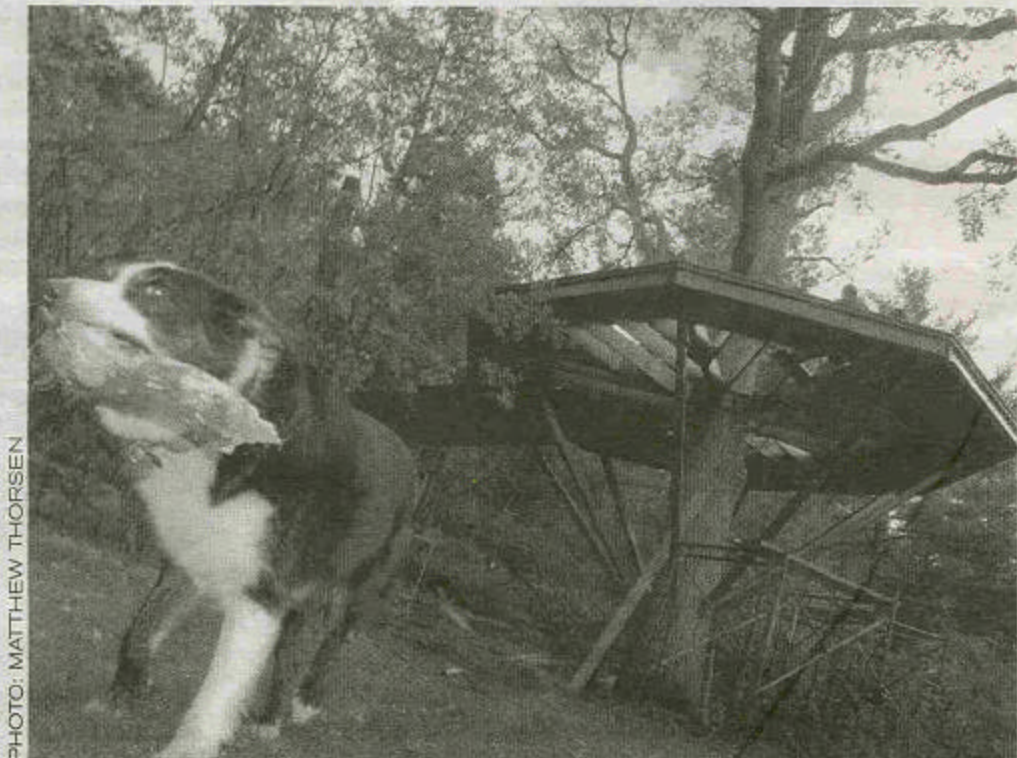


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