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Musical LED seesaws are ready for play at exhibit next to MacArthur Center mall in Norfolk

By LEE TOLLIVER

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Lights flash and musical tones blare, children laugh and parents capture the moment on their cell phones before joining in on the fun.

The holidays at MacArthur Center this season will include seesaws.

These are a far cry from the ones you remember from your childhood.

They're hi-tech to the max, each featuring LED lights and speakers that flash and play as participants go up and down, down and up.

The 12 Canadian-made teeter-totters are open for free fun through January 19, positioned in a "V" next to the outdoor ice skating rink on Monticello Avenue. Six of them are 16 feet long and six more are 24-footers.

They'll be operational from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays, and from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

A crew of nine started assembling the aluminum and fogged plastic seesaws Thursday morning on concrete slabs poured last month. By afternoon, many were up and running. Organizers hoped to get them all that way ahead of foul weather predicted for the weekend.

Joining the seesaw party on Nov. 30 will be an "Island of Warmth" exhibit of lights, smoke, music and warm air designed to resemble a bonfire. On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, there will also be a pop-up bar featuring beer, wine, eggnog and hot chocolate.

Karen Husselbee, the mall's marketing director, had been looking for something to bring more holiday cheer to the ice rink. The mall teamed with the Downtown Norfolk Council to bring the exhibit.

"I just Googled several things and these came up," she said after a few minutes on one that had her smiling like a kid on Christmas morning. "They're just so fun."

The seesaws are the brainchild of Impulse and are “participatory artwork” created by Lateral Office and CS Design in collaboration with the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership of Montreal. They debuted in 2015 and have been touring the world since.

“We’re very fortunate to have them here,” Hussenbee said. “I think they’re going to bring people a lot of joy.”

Also known as teeterboards, seesaws have been entertaining people in the most simple way since they were invented by a lady named S.E. Saul and patented in 1871, according to US Patent No. 116,502.

Seesaws were a commonplace item on children’s playgrounds for decades until federal safety guidelines were created in 1981 after lawsuits from several injuries, according to a story on intellectualltakeout.com entitled “Modern Childhood and the Death of the Seesaw.”

Regardless of their past, seesaws have returned to Hampton Roads to entertain young and old.

“When it’s dark and quiet and all of them are going at once, it’s going to be like an orchestra with lights,” Hussenbee said. “People who remember seesaws are going to love it.”

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