ST GEORGE — Waterworks were on display in more ways than one as a tearful and emotional opening ceremony led into the grand opening of Thunder Junction All Abilities Park where kids and families splashed, slid and swung in the brand new park Saturday afternoon.

Located at 1851 S. Dixie Drive, the grand opening kicked off as the park’s touted train arrived with honored guests. Among the VIPs were St. George Mayor Jon Pike, City Manager Gary Esplin, Park Planning Manager Jeff Peay and Leisure Services Director Kent Perkins. They gave brief remarks and offered thanks to the park’s many helping hands.

“Our collective dream has become a reality. Now we can move on to creating miles and miles of smiles,” Perkins announced.

“Three years of hard work, incredible commitment and generosity of time, talent and resources on the part of so many have brought fruition to this remarkable facility,” Perkins said while holding back tears.
“In my 20-plus years as being a landscape architect and project manager, I’ve never seen a project that’s captured the hearts and the minds of the community like this one has,” Peay said, “and it’s a true blessing to be part of that.”

Peay pointed out the hands on the walls of the park entrance representing some of the people who helped build and plan the park, noting that they only represent a portion of the people who made the project possible.

When Esplin pitched the idea of the park to the city, he said it would be the very best of its kind.

“Let’s make this a place where people from across the country who are planning to build a similar park will come here to learn how to do it,” Esplin said.
Pike led the gathering in a verse from Josh Groban’s song, “You Raise Me Up,” after which a dedicatory prayer was offered.

Upon the ceremony’s completion and sign unveiling, a massive crowd of people representing all ability levels made its way into the park’s front gates. The procession of excited park entrants went on for minutes as the flood of people dispersed into the park’s array of diversions.

Not a single attraction was unused, and most of them had long lines of people politely waiting their turn.

The park was staffed with volunteers representative of its all abilities moniker. They appeared as excited to be there as the guests and did not shirk in their duties to assist people on the park’s numerous attractions.

The park’s attractions are dinosaur-themed and include swings, zip lines, waterfalls, rock-climbing walls, drums and slides.

Entrance is free to all visitors, but guests have the option to pay $1 per person for an accessible train ride behind a bright red locomotive that circles the length of the park.

Years in the making, Thunder Junction is touted as a park for people of all abilities. It includes accommodations for those with disabilities, including secured swings and a wheelchair trail, among many other thoughtful accommodations.
Janeal Wilkerson on the action trackchair at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016
| Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News

Thunder Junction opens to the public, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News
The Stowers family at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News

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Emma Bell rides on the zip line chair with safety cage, at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News
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Macall Harris plays the xylophone at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News

Taysen Augustus at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News
Thunder Junction opens to the public, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News

The Carvajal family rides the train at Thunder Junction's grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News
An aerial view of Thunder Junction at its grand opening, St. George, Utah, Oct. 8, 2016 | Photo by Dave Amodt, St. George News

Email: jwitham@stgnews.com

Twitter: @STGnews

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