

'Heritage' playhouse



Wesley Beeson | The Sanford Herald

Kathy and Mack Wicker climb to the top of the heritage playhouse with grandchildren Maggie Windmeyer, 4, left, and Luke Windmeyer, 1, right. The playhouse was completed last year and involved four generations of the same family.

The family that plays together, stays together

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"And how long did you cook the hamburger?" Kathy Wicker asked. Maggie Windmeyer, 4, looking down at the fist-sized plastic burger, held up a finger and ran inside the two-story,

wooden playhouse. Bounding back out and rushing to her grandmother, she said, "46 minutes."

"Well, my goodness," Kathy said placing the burger to her lips. "It's certainly well done."

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PLAYHOUSE

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Kathy and Mack Wicker, who are both used to such delicacies, play host to their four grandchildren — 7-year-old Andi Wicker, 5-year-old Zeke Wicker, 4-year-old Maggie Windmeyer and 1-year-old Luke Windmeyer — at their 45-acre property on Center Church Road, sometimes as often as once a week. One of the main draws, Mack and Kathy joked, is the two-story playhouse the couple built last spring.

It's called the heritage playhouse, Mack said, because it encompasses four generations including his late mother, Lula. Pine beetles destroyed a dozen pine trees on Lula's property that Mack crafted into the playhouse after three weeks of work.

"I don't have any professional carpentry skills," he said. "Most people who live out in the country who want to build a shed or something, just build the shed."

Andi, who likes to read books and draw, sketched the original design for the playhouse. To Mack's credit, most of her specifications were incorporated into the final product — all save for the pool.

With stairs connecting the two floors, the top features a porch complete with wind chimes and wreaths, and a nature collection of deer antlers, turtle shells, feathers, sea shells and other treasures on the inside. There's a kitchen, grill, workstation, shopping cart, hula hoops and a coloring space downstairs, and pink and green chairs on the outside. A basketball goal is set up on the backside of the structure, and a metal bucket, connected by a pulley system, lets the grandchildren send messages to one another from each of the floors.

"Originally, I was going to give the older ones the upper story so they could have their own hideaway," Mack said, adding that his efforts were in vain when all four grandchildren commandeered the top floor.

Mack and Kathy's son, Jason Wicker, said he appreciates the effort his parents put into constructing the playhouse, and for



Submitted photo

Maggie Windmeyer, 4, from left, Zeke Wicker, 4, Andi Elizabeth Wicker, 6, and Luke Windmeyer, 1, grandchildren of Kathy and Mack Wicker from Center Church Road.



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Maggie Windmeyer, 4, holds a feather as she shows off her collection of nature items on a shelf in the upstairs room of the playhouse.

giving his children a place to play.

"It's probably their favorite thing to do down there," he said, adding that his family lives in the northern part of Chatham County. "Having their own space to exercise their imagination."

The couple's daughter, Holly Windmeyer, said she enjoys watching Luke and Maggie play at their grandparents' house, and claims the siblings and cousins get along better at the playhouse.

"They love it," she said. "We live in town, in a subdivision, and there isn't a lot of room. I am glad they have this. You're able to move in the country, and they can experience the same type of childhood I experienced."

This isn't the first playhouse the couple constructed together. Nearly 30 years ago, Mack and Kathy built a similar structure for their own children.

"It takes me back, certainly," Jason said.

There haven't been any accidents, and the grandparents always make sure a supervisor is on hand when the children are playing in the playhouse. Kathy and Mack often help Luke up and down the stairs, but Maggie needs little assistance while "playing kitchen and making meals for the family."

"It's real sentimental," Kathy said. "It's a good way to get the kids outside. And it's good to get away for us, too."