



T-Awannda Piper (left), STEM coordinator at Demoiselle 2 Femme, helps Stephanie Morris, one of the high school girls building a whimsical playground in a vacant lot in the Roseland neighborhood. | RICHARD A. CHAPMAN-SUN-TIMES

Playground under construction in Roseland — by teen girls

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For two weeks, the sounds of drills, hammers and electric saws have echoed from a vacant lot in a crime-infested corridor of Roseland.

Curious onlookers haven't known quite what to make of what is being built — a whimsical playground offering elements such as mountains, bridges and a river to carry a child's imagination out of the 'hood.

Especially because these are teen girls doing the construction work.

"Our theme is 'Climb, jump or leap and imagine,'" said Stephanie Morris, 16, of Roseland, as she took a break

from hammering on a recent day. "This is kind of like a mountain, and a river-y kind of thing. Then we've built a walkway that's going to service our river."

Let's just say you have to use your imagination until the work is finished.

The unique project in the vacant lot at 144 W. 103rd St., between two buildings and next door to Prayer of Faith Church, is under the auspices of Demoiselle 2 Femme (French for "Young Ladies to Women") an 8-year-old Roseland nonprofit that works with adolescent girls.

Under a pilot summer STEM — Science Technology Engineering and Math — program, the group brought in Alex Gilliam, a Philadel-

phia architect specializing in public projects, to work with girls ages 14 to 18 on a transformative community-design project.

"First was community engagement, fanning out across Roseland to ask residents what they'd like to see in the lot," said Maxine Miller, 18. "The majority said a park."

She paused from digging a hole to pour cement for the mountain. "It's very hard labor, but I don't mind, because it's for the children and to better the community."

The girls have endured the intensive labor amid excessive heat — and the gawking of onlookers — while working toward their goal on this city-owned lot used by the church. They had hoped to

finish in two weeks, but on Friday, two weeks came and went.

"The girls have made good progress, but it's turned out to be more work than they'd expected," said T-Awannda Piper, STEM coordinator at Demoiselle 2 Femme.

"The community has been great so far, but I think the girls could use some help, be it labor, materials or donations," she said. "It's been an opportunity to expose the girls to STEM careers, but the ultimate goal is to raise community consciousness to the possibilities for all these vacant lots not being used for the benefit of a community."

To help, go to www.demoiselle2femme.org or call (773) 779-9371.