



KaBOOM! is Ready for Prime Time

How does a nonprofit that builds playgrounds score a featured role in NBC's Thursday night lineup? Well, first you pick up the phone...

On Thursday, October 22nd, the town of Pawnee, Indiana will get a beautiful new playground thanks to KaBOOM!, a nonprofit dedicated to giving kids fun and safe places to play. The good deed KaBOOM! does that day - building an *entire* playground in just eight hours - should not be diminished by the fact that Pawnee doesn't actually exist.

In fact, of the 1700 playgrounds KaBOOM! has already built across North America, this one may get the most attention. That's because Pawnee is the fictional locale of *Parks and Recreation*, an NBC sitcom, and KaBOOM! will be working its magic in prime time with roughly five million people watching. Best of all, where Nike or Adidas would pay dearly for this kind of product placement, KaBOOM! will receive millions of dollars of exposure for free.



How did the DC-based nonprofit score such an impressive media hit? That story begins with Alison Risso, director of communications. Risso came to KaBOOM! from a similar post at The Discovery

Channel, and along with her considerable expertise, she brought the habit of reading TV industry trades. Last February, she noticed a story about a new show NBC was developing for Amy Poehler of "Saturday Night Live" fame.

Risso brought the story to the attention of Darell Hammond, KaBOOM!'s founder. The show's name alone was enough to convince Hammond that it was a good fit for his organization, and he told Risso to pursue it.

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"So first I called some reporters I knew to see if they had a contact inside the show," Risso told me when we spoke recently. None did, so she tried NBC and promptly ran into another dead end. Finally, Risso called Deedle-Dee Productions, the company producing the show for NBC, and began leaving messages with the receptionist.

"I told them we were a national nonprofit that actually did build playgrounds, and I invited them to come out and see a project," said Risso. She also offered b-roll (i.e., stock footage shot by KaBOOM!) showing play structures being assembled. Risso described her pitch as "big and vague and very what-can-we-do-for-you," but the response was polite and noncommittal and very don't-call-us-we'll-call-you. "I left many, many messages over a couple of weeks," Risso recounted, "but it seemed like nothing took."

Parks and Recreation debuted in April, and a plot line began to play out in which Poehler's character became increasingly determined to build a new park in an abandoned lot. If the show had seemed like a good fit on paper, it was looking even more so every Thursday night, but Risso still heard nothing from Deedle-Dee. "I had given up and completely assumed nothing would ever come of it," she said.

The call she was no longer waiting for came in June. Morgan Sackett, producer of *Parks and Recreation*, told Risso that NBC and the other networks would be participating in a major effort in the fall to promote volunteerism.



And for Sackett's show, KaBOOM! was exactly what Risso described in her messages: a good fit.

"They actually kept the messages," Risso said with amazement still in her voice. "I was floored."

Over the summer, Deedle-Dee sent two staff members to observe KaBOOM! building a playground in La Habra, California. These observations were relayed to the writers who scripted the episode that is set to air (unless preempted) on October 22nd. The character who portrays KaBOOM!'s project manager is "a little exaggerated," according to Risso, "but in a flattering way. Let's just say he's very *energetic*."

Additional characters in the episode portray the project construction team and wear KaBOOM!'s trademark purple shirts. The organization's logo is also displayed prominently during the building scenes. "The producers went out of their way to do more branding of KaBOOM! than we do on real sites," Risso said with a laugh. When asked to put a dollar value on the exposure, Risso declines to even guess. But the return on KaBOOM!'s investment - some phone calls, emails and finger-crossing - must be off the charts.

About Us

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So if you watch *Parks and Recreation* on October 22nd, remember Alison Risso's efforts. While modest and certainly benefiting from fortuitous timing, they still remind us of the value of keeping an eye open for opportunity and thinking big. Even if that means building a playground for a town that doesn't exist.

Is Your Organization Ready for Prime Time?

Download the free report, "Your Issue Here: Working with Hollywood to Deliver Your Message to Millions," available from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's website](#).

Learn how to work with celebrities by reading "Reaching for the Stars," the [February 2003 edition of free-range thinking](#).

Visit the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#), an organization with a long history of entertainment media partnerships.

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Master Storytellers Welcome

Our first advanced storytelling workshop debuts November 4th.

If you've attended one of my storytelling workshops (either in person or online) and you want to take your skills to the next level, the "Master Storytellers Workshop" is for you.

In three one-hour classes (with two weeks between each class), you'll have the opportunity to write up to three stories and receive personalized feedback from both me and your classmates. We'll also explore topics not covered in previous storytelling workshops, including:

- How to find stories in abstract work
- Different techniques for opening and closing a story
- Using stories to reinforce your brand



The workshop will be limited to just 10 students, so each online session will be highly interactive with plenty of time to discuss your work. And each student will have the option of scheduling one-on-one consulting sessions between classes.

Our next session is November 4, November 18 and December 4 (11a-12n PT each day).

Tuition is \$375 per student, and discounts are available to organizations that register three or more. To download a complete course curriculum and register online, [click here](#).

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More Meaty Meetings, Fewer Time-Wasting Webinars

October classes at The Goodman Center can help you improve your meetings (in person and online) and show you how to run webinars that work.

What's the quickest way to increase organizational effectiveness? Improve your meetings! Your organization probably invests countless hours in meetings every week, so why not invest two hours to make sure they actually accomplish something.

Meetings: Less Pain, More Gain is an interactive and fun webinar that has already helped numerous public interest groups, businesses, and schools. Our next classes will be held October 27th and 29th (9-10a PT) and tuition is \$250 per student. To learn more and register online, [click here](#).



If you hold meetings or trainings online - and you'd like to improve these, too - join us on October 1st (9-10a PT) for ***The Webinar on Webinars***. In an engaging and fast-paced hour, we'll show you:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What we learned from talk radio that makes webinars work



This new class debuted in September and promptly sold out, so if you're interested in joining us on October 1st, [click here](#) and register now.

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