All of Pat Rumbaugh's work is play. So much so that the tennis coach says she hopes to integrate playtime -- beyond that of the thumb-to-video game controller variety -- into the lives of Takoma Park residents with Takoma Plays, an organization she founded last year to promote citywide indoor and outdoor play.

"Kids don't play like we did," said Rumbaugh, 52. "It's a different world with all of today's technology."

"We're very fortunate to be able to find information so easily online," she said. "But on the other hand, I feel a little sorry for them because they don't just go out and play like we did, without it being organized and adults telling them what to do."

Mary Hanisco became the organization's director, after meeting Rumbaugh, her neighbor, just days after moving to Takoma Park from Boston. Drawn to the concept and to meeting people, Hanisco secured a $500 grant from the Takoma Foundation for traveling play groups and a $500 grant from the city of Takoma Park for Play Day. Hanisco involves her daughters, Nina, 7, and toddler Lucy in Takoma Plays.

"I've even noticed with the older one, the more she watches TV, the crankier she becomes," Hanisco said. "They really have fun, even if they resist it at first sometimes. I just feel like it's really good for them to be active. I know for myself, I feel better when I'm active."

The 10 traveling play groups focused on jumping rope, blowing bubbles and playing games this summer at Heffner, Sligo Creek and other city parks.

The organization will host Play Day, rain or shine, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Takoma Park Middle School, 7611 Piney Branch Rd. in Silver Spring. Last year's inaugural Play Day drew about 200 people, and Rumbaugh said she hopes that number will swell to 500 this year. She also hopes to find about 50 teen volunteers.

The event will include a community art project in which a mosaic that spells the word "play" will be crafted and installed in a local park, Hanisco said.

Other activities will include floor hockey, double Dutch, tennis lessons, sports clinics with high school athletes, a dress-up parade, intergenerational games and yoga.

Takoma Park Mayor Bruce Williams said he is happy to support the play movement and to get the city involved. He integrated the play program into the city's agenda.

"As we did it, it kind of synchronized very nicely with the first lady's efforts on the national level to reduce childhood obesity," he said of Michelle Obama. "It seemed to be very timely."

Williams suggested that simple games that could be played anywhere with little equipment be incorporated into the program.

"I always used to play balloon ball, which is basically playing volleyball with the balloon," he said. "You don't need a ball or a court; the objective is to keep the ball in the air; it works very well."

Rumbaugh, who's come to be known as the Play Lady, got Takoma Park ranked as one of 118 Playful Cities across the country, a list that's crafted by KaBoom, a nonprofit group that builds playgrounds.
"If you're walking around Takoma Park, you will notice [Rumbaugh] at bake sales as an active fundraiser," said Ben Duda, manager of KaBoom's National Campaign for Play. "She helped Rolling Terrace Elementary School win an Imagination Playground system, an outdoor play equipment system that allows children to build and create."

Duda lauds her for going door-to-door to invite parents to events and keeping the community engaged.

"Right now we have over 1,500 KaBoom Play Day events nationwide, and she has been one of our early champions in this movement," Duda said. "She comes up with amazingly creative, inexpensive and imaginative activities, such as a costume rack for kids."

Growing up as a self-described tomboy in western Pennsylvania, Rumbaugh played the only three sports offered to high school girls at the time: volleyball, basketball and track. She got serious about tennis in college and has been competing in U.S. Tennis Association leagues for more than 20 years.

"Children are exposed to so many activities these days, but a lot of them are not getting to go out and play games on their own or make up games together and be creative," she said. "I'm really big about the whole play movement for everyone, though I want people of all ages to get involved."