

Local News

Saturday, December 24, 2005

Diamond dreams for kids

Minor league baseball co-founders plan special field near the stadium for children with disabilities

By BETH WALTON | Staff writer

A dream to bring minor league baseball to Holland may also include a "Miracle Field" for children with disabilities.

SunCoast Baseball, the organization working to bring a Northern League franchise to Holland in 2007, has proposed developing a Miracle Field -- a baseball field for the disabled -- near the 4,200-seat stadium it wants to build adjacent to the Holland Town Center.

"Even if minor league baseball doesn't happen, this Miracle League will eventually take place in this town," said Ed Mayo Jr., co-founder of SunCoast Baseball and son of former professional ball player Eddie Mayo who spent five years with the Detroit Tigers.

A national nonprofit organization, the Miracle League Association, provides children living with mental and physical disabilities with specialized baseball diamonds. Miracle League baseball diamonds are made of synthetic rubber so children with wheelchairs or walkers can move from base to base. The rubber playing surface, similar to that of an indoor track, also allows children to push around machinery, such as respirators, as they play. There is also no dust to affect their breathing.

"These kids just wouldn't have the opportunity to play in an organized baseball sport like Little League," said Steve Peck, founder of Michigan Miracle and owner to the rights of all Michigan Miracle League ballparks.

Peck said the only Miracle Field now in Michigan is in Southfield.

"These are kids that didn't think they could do anything," Peck said. "Some children with disabilities grow up with people doing everything for them and they have no confidence that they can do anything on their own, so they don't. But now these kids are going up to their parents after the season is ending and asking what can they do next."



HOME RUN: A child touches home plate at a "Miracle Field" in Southfield.

Steve Peck



Peck started the Southfield program two years ago with just 50 players. He expects more than 400 to enroll this year and has been looking at places to expand throughout the state.

Darrin Duistermars, parks and recreation director for Holland Township, said when he was approached by SunCoast, their scheduled 45-minute meeting turned into a three-hour discussion.

"All the sudden this thing is just rolling," he said. "(The Miracle Field) brings opportunity that flat-out does not exist here and this could potentially be a regionalized West Michigan facility."

Duistermars said the township will continue working with SunCoast Baseball and Miracle Michigan as plans for the two fields unfold.

Miracle Fields typically cost about half a million dollars to construct, but by sharing the infrastructure with the proposed minor league stadium, a Miracle League field in Holland could be built for \$200,000, said Dobb Mayo, son of Ed Mayo and chief operating officer for SunCoast Baseball.

The Mayos said they plan to seek grant money to help pay for the Miracle Field, with SunCoast Baseball covering additional expenses.

In Miracle League play, all participants bat once each inning and all get to circle the bases to score. Miracle League players are typically assigned "buddies" who assist them in hitting the ball or running the bases.

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Opinion

Saturday, December 31, 2005

Hits and Misses

Hit: Miracle Field plan. We're intrigued by the plans by SunCoast Baseball, the group seeking to land a minor-league baseball franchise for Holland, to develop a "Miracle Field" for disabled children. One can't overestimate what it means for a disabled child to engage in a mainstream activity like playing baseball. We now have two reasons to root for SunCoast -- to get that baseball franchise and to build the Miracle Field.

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