

Rotary Club of Springdale Brings Miracle League Ballpark to Northwest Arkansas

The Rotary Club of Springdale has embarked on a mission of bringing a Miracle League Ballpark to Northwest Arkansas for the benefit of children with disabilities, and their families. Construction is nearing completion and “opening day” is set for September 11th, 2010. Thanks to generous contributions of cash and in-kind gifts from several Rotarians in our club, as well as many other valuable citizens in our community, we are going to build not just a field for a children’s league, but a second field for an adult league as well. We thought we might eventually be able to build a second field for a Miracle League experience for adults with disabilities to enjoy America’s pastime as we were doing for the kids, but thanks to the generosity of our club members, particularly that of Gerald Harp (PDG 2004-2005), we are making it all happen at once.

While the Rotary Club is leading the development of this park, which will be named “Harp Park,” there will be significant recognition to the great Rotarians of the club who have stepped up and made this come together. We have a wonderful partnership with the City of Springdale thanks to our Mayor Doug Sprouse and the head of our planning and community development division, Patsy Christy, both of whom are Rotarians in our club. The City is contributing the land and procured some funds through HUD for the field surfaces and the City of Springdale Parks and Recreation Department is donating scoreboards, some landscaping supplies, and will take care of maintenance going forward.

The league will be run by The Miracle League of Arkansas, a non-profit organization that provides children with disabilities an opportunity to play baseball as a team member in an organized league. There is something about playing the game of baseball that lights up a child's' eyes, but for children facing physical and/or mental challenges, that opportunity can often be a difficult first step. The Miracle League of Arkansas gives these children the opportunity to get out in the sunshine, and enjoy playing the game of baseball in its purest form, and provides their families the opportunity to enjoy watching their player enjoy America’s pastime. We intentionally built the Miracle League fields adjacent to the baseball park so we can seek to foster better understanding and inclusion among our players and those who are playing on the next field.

The rules of the game will be different. Everyone will bat, get on base and score a run. All games will end in a tie and everyone will have a blast. It's not about winning and losing, it's about being a part of a team, a community and meeting new friends. Many of us belong to clubs and organizations for that very reason. Belonging to a group is important. Miracle League provides these kids and parents with that opportunity.

The Miracle League removes the barriers that keep children with mentally and physically disabilities off the baseball field and let them experience the joy of America's favorite pastime. Since the main barrier for these children arise from the natural grass fields used in conventional youth leagues, Miracle League teams play on a custom-designed, synthetic turf field that accommodates wheelchairs, and other assisted devices while helping to prevent injuries.

There will be ongoing opportunities for volunteerism to serve as a team coach, a

“buddy” of a player at a game, a pitcher, or whatever else makes game days fun. There will also be league sponsorship opportunities to cover the expenses of operating the league. We are very excited to be driving this project in our district and expect to benefit children and families for a 50+ mile radius of Springdale. Rotary is about service to others, and this project is a perfect fit. For more information, please contact Rotarian Blake Hanby at bhanby@wacotitle.com.