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Friday, July 11, 2003

## Southfield OKs ball field

League seeks place to build playing area for disabled children

By Delores Patterson / *The Detroit News*

**SOUTHFIELD** -- Southfield is poised to become home to the state's first baseball field built exclusively for children with disabilities.

This week the seven-member City Council gave unanimous approval to the Miracle League of Michigan to build a T-ball-size field behind the new Southfield Library if organizers give final approval. The league also is considering Troy.

Conceived nationally five years ago, the Miracle League uses a special rubberized playing surface similar to that used on Olympic tracks and designed to look like a baseball field. Bases are built into the field to avoid obstructions, and dugouts, rest rooms and changing areas are wheelchair accessible, according to Stephen Peck, chairman of the organization based in Southfield.

Other adaptive sports programs for children include softball but use standard fields, making it difficult for those with walkers, wheelchairs and respirators to move around.

"It's a wonderful idea for those almost-forgotten children who don't get to participate in activities," Southfield City Councilman Myron Frasier said. "And it gives healthy children a chance to work with them and discover these kids aren't much different than them."

The league invites children from youth leagues to sign up as buddies to help players with disabilities navigate the field in noncompetitive games. About 75 percent of the participants from cities that have such facilities need assistance, according to Peck. The organization plans to make the facility available to senior citizens who live in homes and assisted living, and is seeking involvement from the Detroit Tigers.

The county's field should be ready for play next summer and is expected to draw children from across the state.

The group will choose a location by the end of the month, after Troy votes on the issue. Part of the deal requires that the host city donate the land for the \$500,000 project, which is funded through grants, foundations, corporations and fund-raisers.

Other criteria include highway access and proximity to other recreation. There are seven Miracle League fields in the United States. The first was built in 1998 in Conyers, Ga., and at least 50 are in the works across the country.

### Who's disabled

\* About 1 in 12 people ages 5 to 20 have a physical disability. There are more than 240,000 children in Michigan with disabilities.

\* In Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe and Washtenaw, there are 790,000 people who have a physical or mental disability.

Source: Miracle League of Michigan

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Tony Filippis of Rochester Hills-based Wright-Filippis, nationally known for its artificial limbs and braces, started the process locally. Southfield and Troy were singled out because of their size.

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