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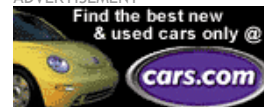
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Southfield field to answer kids' dreams

New diamond to be for disabled athletes

July 26, 2003

BY FRANK WITSIL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Under a blue sky made for baseball, leaders of the Miracle League of Michigan announced plans Friday to turn a Little League field into one more suitable for athletes with disabilities.

The field, currently known as Little League Diamond No. 3 and located near the Southfield Municipal Complex off Evergreen Road, would be the first of its kind in the state, said Steve Peck, who founded the nonprofit group.

Speaking near the diamond to a crowd of about 100 people, the organization kicked off a fund-raising campaign. The group needs \$500,000 to construct the field, Peck said.

The Southfield-based Miracle League plans to replace the diamond's finely crushed gravel with a rubbery material that would be safer for disabled athletes and to construct disabled-accessible dugouts and bathrooms.

"This will give the disabled the opportunity to play ball," said Bill Waterhouse, Southfield director of parks and recreation.

The city began discussing the the idea about three months ago, and the City Council agreed to allow the field to be modified, Waterhouse said.

The modified ballpark is set to open next year.

A Little League coach, Peck said he got the idea from watching a disabled brother of one of his players who also wanted to play ball. This, he said, inspired him to search for a disabled-friendly field.

Peck, 47, of Birmingham, said he found that the Miracle League in Conyers, Ga., had made one and applied to form his own affiliate group. So far, he said, one company has donated money.

A.J. Filippis, president of Wright & Filippis, a Rochester Hills-based seller of prosthesis, handed Peck a check for \$25,000 after the plans were announced.

Mayor Brenda Lawrence, who was at the announcement, praised the plan. She said the field will showcase the city's "sensitivity and our awareness to the diverse needs of the community."

And Jim Northrup, the former Detroit Tiger who was on the team when it won the world championship in 1968, said such a field will help young disabled athletes who want to compete.

"They may be disabled," he said. "But like any kid, they want to play."

For more information about the nonprofit group or to make a donation, call 248-506-4604 or visit www.michiganmiracle.org.

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