

Planned park intended to level playing fields

Murrysville 's project will open recreation to special needs athletes.

BY PAUL Paterra
TRIBUNEREVIEW

For a decade, George O'Donnell has had a vision for a "miracle field" in Murrysville where children could play baseball together, regardless of ability or disability.

His dream will become a reality.

O'Donnell established the "Friends to Friends" organization in 1995 to bring children with special needs together with others in a social environment. O'Donnell's son, Georgie, has cerebral palsy, suffers from grand mal seizures, and is legally blind and deaf in one ear.

How to help

Donations can be made to The Rotary Miracle Field of Murrysville Fund, c/o The Community Foundation of Westmoreland County, 951 Old Salem Road, Penthouse Suite, Greensburg, PA 15601.

The Murrysvillebased foundation stages baseball games, but most fields aren't conducive for handicapped children, especially in rainy weather.

"It gets muddy and children in wheelchairs or with walkers or in beds can't play," O'Donnell said. "So I looked into it and decided to do something about it."

O'Donnell and Harold Hicks, assistant district governor of the MurrysvilleExport Rotary Club, spoke to Mayor Joyce Somers and Murrysville Council, which decided to donate nearly 4 acres for the field at Murrysville Community Park on Wiestertown Road.

The project will cost \$1.5 million The Rotary Club is spearheading the fundraising effort has collected about \$80,000.

"We wanted to be able to assist in seeing the dream come true," Hicks said.

The Buncher Family Foundation of Pittsburgh is picking up the cost of a fulltime fundraiser for the project.

Our committee decided the concept of the 'miracle field' was so wonderful that it provided opportunities for all children to ay sports regardless of abilities said Christine Beattie, program officer for the foundation. We wanted to make sure it was a success."

Hicks visited miracle fields in Altoona, Morgantown, W.Va., and Huntsville, Ala., to gather information. He says this field will be bigger and better than those he has seen.

The concept of the miracle field dates to 1998, after a youth baseball coach in Conyers, Ga., invited a child in a wheelchair to play on his team and others wanted to follow. However, problems arose because the fields were not equipped to handle the needs of all children with disabilities.

The field in Murrysville will have a rubberbased surface.

Baselines and bases will light up to accommodate players with hearing problems. Bases will vibrate for blind children so they know when to leave the base. Dugouts will be air-conditioned and enclosed in Plexiglas.

The field may be operational by late summer of 2009. Four bocce courts, two shuffleboard decks and a 3.1 mile walking trail are planned. The Murrysville Senior Center is raising money to complete these portions.