



Print Page

New Little League field sparkles like a 'diamond'

By Amy Artino, Peninsula News  
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PVE — The Lunada Bay Little League, of Palos Verdes Estates, is off to a fresh start this season: The plaza area between the major and minor fields has been renovated completely.

The area now boasts 5,200 square feet of new, colored concrete, a new snack shack and barbecue area, seven new carrotwood trees, pepper trees in the outfield, picnic tables with umbrellas, major-field landscaping, new dugout roofs, new backboards, renovated stands, a new entry sign and fence, and a new, state-of-the-art scoreboard donated by the Lexus corporation.

"There was a plan that was done in 2005 that was attached to the storage room wall, and I was always fascinated with it," said Kevin Shannon, who has been president of the Lunada Bay Little League since June 2009. "When I was asked to become president, I thought it would be a neat thing to do."

The 2005 plan included a new snack shack, "but was never finished," Shannon said. He added that the cost of concrete is down about 30 to 40 percent because of the economy, so it seemed "like a good time to do it. I took it to the [LBLL] board, and they said, 'Let's go for it.'"

The entire project, which was completed in about three months — just in time for opening day on Feb. 28 — was funded entirely with "plaza-specific" donations from the community, Shannon said. The LBLL board began a sponsorship program that required a \$5,000 minimum donation for people wishing to become "plaza donors." Shannon said 18 families came together to raise a whopping \$110,000 — their names were put on a plaque that was unveiled during opening day festivities. According to Shannon, between 260 and 290 kids play in the LBLL in an average season.

"Everyone on the board had a big part in [this project], too," Shannon said. "Bill McBride, who is the chairman of fundraising, [gave] a huge contribution, and Steve Gherardi is a board [member], who basically became the contractor for the project ... When they poured the concrete, he sat out there for eight hours to make sure nobody got near it."

Gherardi, who has four boys — two currently play for the league, one has "graduated" from the league and the fourth will play when he's old enough — called himself "a constant Little League dad."

"I'm a lifer," he added with a laugh. "I've always been involved with the kids' sports and activities. I'm there as a volunteer [board] member and I'm in construction [for business], so it really fell into my hands to do the job."

Shannon estimated that the new scoreboard from Lexus cost about \$18,000. LBLL donated their old scoreboard to the Baldwin Park Little League, which needed a new one after theirs had been vandalized, Shannon said.

If you fund it, they can play

The league needs to raise about a \$17,000 to \$20,000 annually to break even, Shannon said. He attributed that deficit to less snack shack revenue than other leagues and the fact the LBLL is a smaller league than others in the area.

"This year, between the normal fundraising we do outside of the [one for the] plaza renovation, we raised about \$136,000, plus the scoreboard," he said. "In this time, with the economy [being] so tough, we were real happy to be able to do this. The goal was to give a lasting legacy to the community."

"It came out great, I was really happy with the results," Gherardi said of the finished project. "It was done fairly inexpensively [too] — a lot of the vendors and subcontractors gave us some really good deals."

According to City Manager Joe Hoefgen, the fields and plaza are property of the Palos Verdes Unified School District. Pearl Iizuka, deputy superintendent of the PVPUSD, said the district allows the LBLL to use the property.

"They have the ability to do [such] projects without having to get permission from us, per se, unless there are structural changes [to be made], Iizuka said. "[In that case,] we would have to go through the division of the state architect.

"We're happy for them," she continued. "I've had a chance to take a look and it looks wonderful. Congratulations to them for their work."

For more information about the Lunada Bay Little League, log on to [www.lbll.us](http://www.lbll.us).

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Baseball instructor and former Kansas City Royals outfielder Dave Leeper, wearing sunglasses, stands with Lunada Bay Little League board member Steve Gherardi, center, back, and Gherardi's son, Kyle, right, back, and some other members of the LBLL White Sox team. The sign behind them is just one of many new additions recently made to the plaza area of the Little League fields in Lunada Bay. PHOTO: TOM UNDERHILL