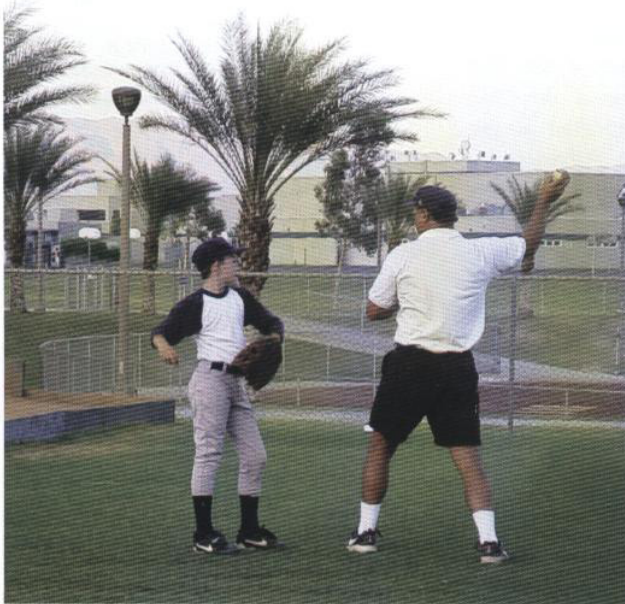


Dreaming of the Big Leagues

Cathedral City, Calif., realizes the benefits of a public/private partnership



Cathedral City is a community of mainly working class families. The city has always worked hard to provide good recreational facilities for its residents. Some of the first capital improvements after the city's incorporation in 1982 were parks and a community recreation center. As the city grew, the need for additional parks and recreational facilities also grew. Unfortunately revenue did not keep pace with development. Through the mid 90's one of the main goals of the city was to construct another major city park. The question was how to meet our goal with only limited resources.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenges for building a major recreational facility on city-owned land were numerous. The first challenge was to identify what elements the park should contain. To accomplish that task the city hired an outside consultant that prepared several different park configurations based on input from the communi-

ty and city council. The plans ranged from a large, passive park, to one that included a new recreation center, ball fields, and a swimming pool. After much review, the city elected to move forward with a design that included almost everyone's wishes. The estimates to construct the park and pool were around \$7 million. In an effort to fund the project, the city went to the voters in March of 1996 with

two bond measures. One of the key elements that rose to the surface of the debates was the ongoing maintenance costs of the park element. The pool was going to be maintained by the adjacent school district, but the park maintenance costs were estimated at \$500,000 per year. The high annual maintenance costs were the points that those opposed to the bonds and the projects used to defeat both measures.

Once the bond measures failed it was clear that the city needed to find a way to build a recreational facility that would not directly impact local property owners and had no ongoing maintenance costs.

THE SOLUTION

In late 1995, while I was the Economic Development Director for the city, I received a proposal from a company that wanted to build a pay-to-play sports park that included replica baseball/softball stadiums, roller hockey, soccer fields, and a sports restaurant. They called their

project Big League Dreams.

After hearing their proposal, I felt it would be a tremendous asset to Cathedral City. I presented the idea to the city manager and was given the green light to move forward and look for possible sites within the city. We had estimated the sports park would require about 20 acres of land. Several sites were available, but each had limitations and drawbacks.

It was shortly after I received the Big League Dreams proposal that the city bond issue to construct a new park and pool failed. Knowing that the city wanted to build a park on the 20 acres of land it owned, I explored the possibility of



building the sports park on the city site. To make the project more appealing to the city, we explored the possibility of Big League Dreams also constructing and maintaining a five-acre passive public park around the sports park.

I presented the idea to the city council in closed session. I knew they would be concerned about moving forward with a completely different project on the same site we had just proposed building a typical city park. Fortunately the council saw the same opportunity I did. We could get much more than just a park and the best part was that the deal would create a positive financial impact for the city and give our residents world-class playing facilities without costing the taxpayers one dollar.

Once the city council endorsed the