

TRENDS

# Big League Dreams hits home run

BY BENJAMIN SPILLMAN  
THE DESERT SUN

A company that built itself by making replicas of historic baseball parks accessible to players from little league baseball to recreational-league softball is now completing a field of dreams for its corporate staffers.

The corporate headquarters of Big League Dreams U.S.A., which opened its first park in 1998 in Cathedral City, is moving to offices in a \$13.5 million sports park in Chino Hills. Employees will primarily move from corporate offices in Riverside.

None of the nearly 70 employees at the original facility in Cathedral City will be affected by the move, a company official said.

"They offered to build us some new office space at the park and we accepted," said Ron Odekirk, whose sons Rick and Jeff Odekirk are founders and majority owners of the company. "Cathedral City is still our favorite park."

The elder Odekirk is retired and serves mainly as a consultant.

**PLANNED:** The new park is one of several on the drawing board for the growing company and is being built at more than twice the cost of the firm's original park at 33-370 Date Palm Drive.

And, unlike the Cathedral City facility, Big League Dreams won't go into debt on the Chino Hills park.

That's because Chino Hills taxpayers are footing the bill for construction costs. They hope that the city will earn the money back, with profits, through a lease agreement with Big League Dreams.

The difference between the Cathedral City and Chino Hills agreements illustrate the evolution of Big League Dreams. In five years it has grown from a concept looking for a home to a company courted by cities nationwide to meet the demand for recreational sports facilities without the burden of expensive overhead costs.

"You are going to see a lot more public/private partner-

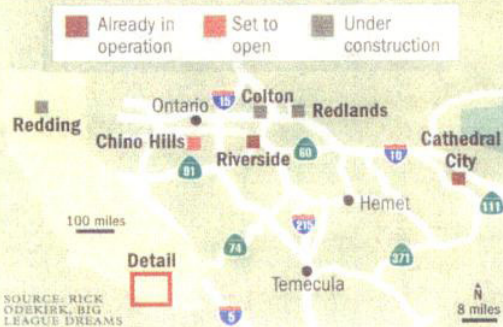


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**At work:** Assistant director of maintenance Rick Kerr from Big League Dreams in Cathedral City drives the infield machine used to smooth out the playing fields for baseball games.

## Big League Dreams expansion

Big League Dreams U.S.A. is on the verge of a rapid expansion of publicly financed/privately run parks throughout Southern California. The company has plans to add at least two parks per year for the next five years. The following parks are either already in operation, set to open or under construction.



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ships (like Big League Dreams)," said Chris Buydos, an economic development manager at the University of California, Riverside.

Buydos said Big League Dreams-style parks are prime candidates for public financing because they serve two purposes. First, they attract tournaments and high-profile events, like the Pepsi All-Star Softball Challenge in Cathedral City, that are too large for most public parks. Second, they allow cities to offer enhanced park

facilities to residents willing to pay a usage fee.

**NEW PARKS:** In addition to existing parks in Cathedral City, Riverside and the unopened park in Chino Hills, there are Big League Dreams parks under construction in Redding, Colton and Redlands, and three more projects "on the near horizon," co-owner Rick Odekirk said.

But he added that without a partnership with the government of Cathedral City, the Chino Hills project would not exist.

"If Cathedral City hadn't

succeeded first, none of these things would have happened," Odekirk said. "We were unproven; they took a chance on us."

The move will mostly involve shifting Chief Executive Officer Scott Parks LeTellier and a small staff from offices at the company's Riverside park to the new facility in San Bernardino County.

At the time of its construction, the first Big League Dreams park was an untested concept. As such, officials in Cathedral City were able to make a deal by which the company is repaying the city for \$5.9 million in bonds it issued to build the park. The city also provided a loan guarantee of \$1 million which it confirmed is being repaid.

The company's newer projects are largely built with public funds. The demand for the parks enables the firm to pick and choose where it builds, Ron Odekirk said. "We would not be going into debt at any other parks," he said. "The cities are building parks for us at their cost."

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