

A Home Run for the West Suburbs

New Miracle League field coming thanks to local collaboration.

BY KATHY RUDOLPH

Not many kids can say they were the inspiration for a new baseball field. But someday Luke Magulick, age 2½, will be able to.

Luke, the son of Mike and Christina Magulick of Moon Township, was diagnosed with 5p- Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that affects only 50 to 60 births a year in the United States.

“When Luke was diagnosed, my wife and I wanted to do something to help families of children with special needs,” explains Mike Magulick. “It was difficult to navigate. Should we write a book, or a blog? Make videos? What would be the best way?”

The answer came while he was coaching for The Miracle League of the South Hills in Upper St. Clair, founded by Sean Casey, a former first baseman for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

The first Miracle League was founded in 2000 in Conyers, Georgia, and has grown to include more than 240 locations across the country, including Puerto Rico and Canada. The league serves children and adults who suffer from physical or mental disabilities and eliminates barriers that keep them off the baseball field, such as replacing the natural grass fields used in conventional leagues with a custom-designed, rubberized turf field that accommodates wheelchairs and other assistive devices while helping to prevent injuries.

“We saw all of the things that the league was able to do for everyone in the community,” says Magulick, who has been a Miracle League coach for five years.

With locations in Cranberry, Upper St. Clair and Murrysville, there was a void in the west suburbs, making Moon Township an ideal choice for a Miracle League site. A board made up of family and friends was formed and the group received approval from the league’s national organization and from Moon Township. With that, The Miracle League of Moon Township was born.

“Wow!” was my first reaction to the possibility of Moon Township being home to a Miracle League Field,” says Moon Township Manager Dawn Lane. “Now that the possibility has turned into reality, we have a lot to do. The Board of Supervisors



(L-R) Jack, Luke, Mike and Christina Magulick.

Photos courtesy Mike Magulick

and staff are anxiously working through all the pieces with the Magulicks to provide space for this facility, while maintaining the field space we currently have allotted for other sports programs in Moon. The development of this field will not only benefit Moon area children with handicap accessibility needs, but all children in the surrounding communities. Needless to say, we are beyond excited.”

With tentative plans to break ground next fall, the Miracle League field will be located at Endeavor Field in Moon Park on Ewing Road. In addition to the field, the site will include an adaptive playground with a space theme, adaptive restrooms, walking trails, a parking lot, pavilions and more. Along with baseball, future plans include offering other sports for athletes who have special needs, ages 8 and up, in Moon and other municipalities. The site will also be available for the entire community to use.

“The most important thing we are trying to do is make sure everyone comes and uses the campus once it’s up and running,” says

Magulick. “First and foremost, the core of this is to provide a place for athletes with special needs to participate in sports, but it’s also a community asset just like anything else in the park.”

There are also other benefits. “The Miracle League is built for athletes with special needs and has a huge impact on them, but I think one piece that gets overlooked are the leadership qualities that middle school and high school kids are getting by becoming Buddies,” notes Magulick.

One of the many volunteer opportunities in the league involves a “Buddy” system to help the athletes—pairing each player with an able-bodied peer.

“My nieces, who are in ninth and tenth grade, joined as Buddies,” says Magulick. “At first they said, ‘Uncle Mike is coaching and this will also help Luke.’ As Luke gets older, it’s much more than that. I’ve seen them really grow—watching them interact with the players and having fun.”

The estimated cost of the project is \$2 million and will be financed by donations and fundraising. The board secured Pirates Charities as a major sponsor, and will receive support from RBVetCo, Rocky Bleier’s veteran-owned general contracting company. Robert Morris University will also be a strategic partner and will provide interns and grant writing.

The project has received positive feedback. “It’s very emotional and humbling for our board to see how many people really want to be a part of this,” says Magulick. “We met people at Community Day who told us how much they appreciated what we were doing, but could only afford to give \$5. It was difficult to take their money because it was a real hardship for them to do it.

Others said they tried to create a baseball league 15 years ago for kids with special needs and it didn’t work. A couple told us they never thought they’d see their grandson play baseball because of his diagnosis, and now they’ll be able to.”

Mike Sherry is president and founder of The Miracle League of Southwestern PA, the first league in the Pittsburgh area, which was formed in 2007. “My wife Chris and I couldn’t be happier and more excited for Mike and Christina,” Sherry says. “It was always our vision 10 years ago to see Miracle League fields built in communities all around western PA. We are confident that the Moon Township community will rally around Mike and Christina so that they fundraise and eventually build a ball field that is accessible to all children.”

For more information on donating and volunteering opportunities, visit the website at miraclesinmoon.org. ■

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Miracle League Coming to Moon Park

Moon Park will soon be home to a Miracle League baseball field, which will provide individuals with special needs the opportunity to play America's pastime in a safe environment.

The Miracle League removes the barriers that cause children and adults with mental and physical disabilities to be excluded from conventional baseball leagues. Miracle League teams play on a custom-designed, rubberized turf field that accommodates wheelchairs and other assistive devices while helping to prevent injuries.

But for the athletes, it's more than playing a game. The Miracle League is about making new friends, building self-esteem and being treated just like other athletes. The league uses a "buddy" system which pairs each player with an able-bodied peer, resulting in an indescribable bond.

Luke Magulick is the inspiration for the field. The son of Mike and Christina Magulick of Moon, Luke has a genetic disorder known as 5P- Syndrome. The Magulick's, along with family and friends, formed The Miracle League of Moon Township, a 501c3 nonprofit, to begin raising funds for the project. They've received approval from the Miracle

League national organization and have partnered with Pirates Charities.

The field in Moon will be a first for Pittsburgh's western suburbs. Other Miracle Fields in the Pittsburgh area include Cranberry Township, Upper St. Clair and Murrysville. In addition to the field, facilities will include a 9,500-square-foot adaptive playground with a moon theme. The adaptive playground will allow kids with and without disabilities to play in the same areas of the playground. Pavilion seating and restrooms will provide a completely inclusive campus for families to enjoy.

To learn more about The Miracle League of Moon Township, please visit miraclesinmoon.org or contact miraclesinmoon@gmail.com.



Community Service Blooms at Fleur de Lune Garden at Robin Hill

The new garden at Robin Hill is called "Fleur de Lune" which translates as Flower of the Moon. Located on the north side of the park, the garden features native species landscaping with improved sustainability and accessibility. The design includes an herb garden, a hillside rock garden, a large pergola, benches, raised stone beds, a potting barn and sculptures. Visitors will also enjoy a sensory garden with olfactory, visual, auditory, tactile and even gustatory (tasting) stimuli. The previous site on the south side of the property will be repurposed into a natural area featuring a wild flower meadow and bee sanctuary that links to the Black Cherry Spur Trail.

The new garden is a total community project coordinated by the township's Community Engagement department. Students from ITT Technical Institute collaborated with Moon Garden Club President Ellen Northy and fellow Garden Club member Merrienne Cacali to create the final plan. Moon Township public works staff designed and built stone garden beds. Friends and family of the late Patricia Stilwell donated a large pergola, weeping cherry trees and benches in her honor. Eagle Scout Aaron Tilton, a Moon Area High School student, developed the hillside rock garden, and the West Hills Art League plans to integrate art features. To honor the old herb garden's historical past, Moon Historical Society President Earl Edwards is creating an interpretive sign with four panels depicting the history of the garden's use over time. Edwards, also designed four other interpretive historical signs located throughout the township.

A grand opening event is planned for Fall 2017. Look for details on the Moon Township Garden Club website at moontownshipgardenclub.com.

To support the garden through donation and /or stewardship, contact Amy Ottaviani, at 412.262.1703 ext 402.