



Sports Fields

Tips for Leagues That Must Maintain Their Facilities !

By Paul Zwaska - Beacon Athletics - Recreation Management Magazine

I've spent the past 10 years helping a Little League in Wisconsin improve their facilities. In doing so, we have greatly strengthened the health and the organization of the league. Much of what we have done can easily be replicated by most any organization. But it all comes down to having a board of directors interested in making the league and its facility the best it can be. It requires people with good organizational skills, good operational skills and at least one person who is the dreamer. Someone to look out into the future and imagine what is possible for an organization to achieve.

Good Leadership . .

Too often, leagues are run by boards that are pretty transient. Board members come and go frequently as their kids become involved but then grow out of the league. Many times, some of these members are only serving on the board for their own personal reasons, i.e., their own child. But a board must serve the common good for the entire league. What I have found to be most successful is having the majority of the board made up of people who no longer have kids in the program. They provide stability in the organization as they serve more for the community than for their own child. They tend to stay involved for longer periods of time, making it easier to stay on course with long-term planning. It is OK to have a percentage of that board made up of current parents of players, but if possible, I would recommend trying to keep that level at 50 percent or less.

Get Organized . .

A league must be run like a business. And a good business knows where its money is coming from and where it is going to. If your league doesn't have a budget yet, then it is time to get busy and make one. Without a budget, it is pretty hard to plan for future upgrades to the league and its facility. The more detailed the budget, the easier it is to plan for the future. Our league was not operating under a budget when I joined. Now we have full control of costs and can clearly plan expenses. A couple of budget lines we find useful are emergency funds and facility upgrades. We can put defined revenue into the proper budget category, thereby helping it to become reality.





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Have a Long-Range Plan . .

A long-range plan sets the tone for the organization. It creates targets to aim for. As you achieve each target, it gives the organization a sense of accomplishment. It proves to the membership that the organization is moving forward. And as you achieve each target, that project is crossed off the list and you begin to set your sights for the next target. The long-range plan should be a three- to five-year living document that is revisited once a year to ensure that priorities are in proper alignment. These targets can be moved as priorities or needs change. This is a crucial steering document for an organization. No more flying from the seat of your pants.

Healthy Revenue Streams . .

When I first enlisted my son into the Little League I would later get involved with, I was shocked at how cheap it was. They were charging a low price for the opportunity for kids to play, but in exchange, they allowed the fields and facility to fall into some disrepair.

Here's a newsflash: Parents want to send their kids to nice facilities, and they are willing to pay what is reasonable. As long as parents see that your organization is putting money back into the facility and it is improving, you will rarely get complaints about increasing registration costs, as long as the fees are within reason.

Registration revenue now accounts for almost **50 percent** of total revenue for the organization. Because of our detailed budgeting, we are able to use scholarships to pay for families who can't afford the registration fee. No child who is interested in playing in our league is ever turned away. In fact, we provide between 70 and 100 full and partial scholarships a year at our facility.

Concessions sales account for 26 percent of total revenue. Just like in professional ballparks, concessions are a key part of fundraising. A captive audience gets hungry and thirsty. It's an easy sell, and a good concessions manager can optimize your sales with timely specials, reasonable profit margins and a good variety of quality food during the long season. Concessions can keep things fresh with new ideas and opportunities available for increasing revenues.

Fundraising accounts for **22 percent** of our revenue stream. We use several smaller fundraising events throughout the year, and when their revenues are added together at the end, they amount to a sizable revenue stream. Most of this money is budgeted toward standard operational expenses. For larger projects requiring greater funding, a separate plan needs to be drafted, spelling out the scope of the project, what it will cost and how the funding will be raised. Be prepared to have at least 50 percent of those you approach for donations say no. Don't take that personally; the project just didn't fit their interests. When you do get larger donations, celebrate the victory and use that feeling to channel your energy forward until your goal is reached. Use a four-pronged attack to raising the money by approaching charitable foundations, local businesses, league alumni and current membership.



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Back in 2002, 815 kids were playing in the program. The organization was working with yearly revenue of just under \$150,000. Ten years later, 1,708 kids were able to enjoy Little League at our facility, and our gross revenue for the organization in 2012 was \$480,000. Over the past 10 years, more than \$600,000 in facility upgrades have occurred, and we are currently in a capital campaign to raise \$1.7 million for some larger facility projects.

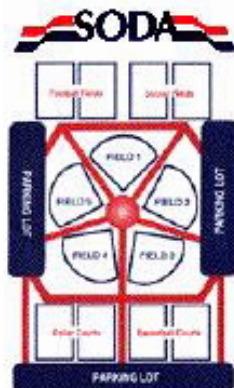
I remember the day back in 2002 when our Little League board scoffed at me after I presented my first 10-page long-range plan to increase our revenues and improve the facility. They didn't believe it could be done. Sometimes, it just takes a dreamer and some organization. That famous line is true, **"If you build it, they will come."**

About the Author:

Paul Zwaska has been in the groundskeeping industry for 34 years, with experience in institutional grounds, golf turf and professional and youth athletic fields. He is the former head groundskeeper of the Baltimore Orioles, where he spent 16 years minding their ballfield. Zwaska has spent the past 10 years deeply involved on the board of the West Madison Little League in Madison, Wis., where he oversees facilities maintenance and operations and manages the organization's nearly half-million-dollar operating budget. Zwask currently works for Beacon Athletics as technical sales manager. For more information, visit www.beaconathletics.com.



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