

Drive-in's lawsuit means ballfield complex can't turn on the lights ?

by: Adam Wright

NORTH RIDGEVILLE – A judge has ordered **Ohio Sports Park** to shut off its ballpark lights for two weeks after **Aut-O-Rama Twin Drive-In Theatre** filed a lawsuit saying the lights were creating problems for moviegoers.

Owner Debbie Sherman said the lights create a glare on Screen One off Lorain Road and beam right into the faces of moviegoers watching Screen Two.

"Last week, we had people fill out surveys to tell us what they thought, and most people thought something was wrong with the equipment," Sherman said. "There`s no telling how many people went away before that, just disgusted."

The lights have been a problem since the drive-in opened for business three weeks ago, Sherman said, and she drove to the sports park that first night to speak with the owner, Larry Vassil. Vassil said he rode back with Sherman to see the problem for himself.

"I couldn`t tell to be perfectly blunt with you," he said. "I sent someone else out there to see when our lights were turned off, and they said the difference was minimal."

He said appointments were scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday for the city building inspector, a representative from the light manufacturer and an electrician to come out and address Sherman`s complaints, but the rain prevented the appointments. He hopes to bring them in today.

"We`re not bad people. We`re not trying to violate anyone`s privacy. We`ll work something out," he said.

Vassil said the temporary injunction issued by Common Pleas Court Judge Edward Zaleski barring him from illuminating the ballfields will be a tough blow.

"We`re in trouble," he said. "We can`t play the spring session, and furthermore we have people who have already rented for this weekend that will have 35 to 40 (softball) teams."



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This latest problem is just one in a series of setbacks Vassil has had to deal with since the \$3 million 67-acre park opened in April. Negotiations between the city and a nearby landowner prevented an access road from being constructed for the park, and it still isn't in place, meaning the park does not have electricity, water or sewage.

"I spend \$14,000 a month on generators," he said.

North Ridgeville Mayor David Gillock said he believes once the meeting with lighting consultants happens, the problem will be fixed.

"I think they'll be able to adjust the lights," he said.

Gillock said while the sports park is a valuable addition to the city, the drive-in has been a longtime business that also must be protected. It's been in business since 1965.

"The sports park is over 600 feet away from the Aut-O-Rama, which is a long way, but those are bright lights," he said.

Gillock said the city first became aware of the drive-in's concerns earlier this week, and both the Building and Law departments are reviewing the situation.

The lawsuit also asks for more than \$50,000 to cover court costs and other losses as a result of the lights, Sherman said.

