



Diamond participation on the decline in Monroe, MI !

by By Jeff Meade

Youth baseball and softball participation is down more than 40 percent this year in the City of Monroe and early adult registration also is down.

Last year **717** area youth ages 3 to 18 participated in Monroe Recreation ball programs. This year the number is about **435**. The deadline to register was March 17, although late sign-ups still are being accepted in the Recreation Department at Monroe City Hall.

"We still take kids late as long as we can," said Recreation Superintendent Loretta LaPointe. "We still might get some more."

Adults have until April 1 to sign up for their leagues, so it still is too early to say what those final numbers might be although the early numbers are not encouraging. City officials say a number of area residents were under the impression Monroe no longer was offering a recreation program.

"Last year it was listed as being cut several times (in the original proposed city budget)," LaPointe said. "It could be confusing people who might not realize there is going to be a ball program."

She said other possible reasons include "as a whole, ball is not as big of a sport. You have a lot of kids playing soccer and involved in electronics and video games. Some people have gone elsewhere. **(Adult) Softball was huge 30 years ago, but it's down everywhere now. A lot of people don't realize the value of youth sports. We want people to realize we're still here and ball is still a good investment of their time.**"

City Councilman Chris Bica attended this week's Recreation Advisory Board meeting. He said concerning adult softball, "There's a week left to sign up and we're 20 percent off where we were last year. They're going elsewhere."

"We're really low on youth ball and adult ball," he added. "People thought we wouldn't have this program. I think that's why we lost people. We're still having recreation. The bathrooms will be open."

City Manager George Brown said the city can contact past users via e-mail. The city has not published a newsletter recently, but the Recreation Department now is on Facebook at "city of Monroe, MI recreation department" with information regarding rain-outs and other ball news. Councilwoman Marry Conner suggested the city send a timely letter to the athletic directors of all Monroe area schools so they can get the word out to their students.



~ (continued) ~





Diamond participation on the decline in Monroe, MI !

~ (continued) ~

Councilman Jeremy Molenda said the city appears to be suffering from problems experienced last year.

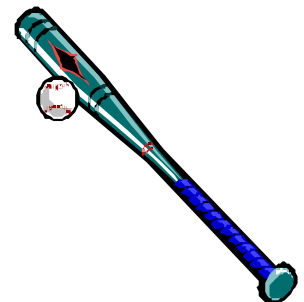
"We heard a lot of complaints last year about conditions of the diamonds," he said. **"Those people are not going to be in a rush to come back. We have to get the message out that recreation is alive and well again."**

Bica said he heard probably 50 to 60 complaints. "Last year the fields weren't lined for the opening day of ball season. People thought we were just giving up on recreation," he said. "We feel like we've corrected things. We definitely need to get the word out there. Years ago when we had **280 men's teams**, we made money. Now when we have **40**, it's costing us money."

Monroe's Recreation Department has been cut back to two full-time staff but the program also has 130 part-time employees and another 300 volunteers.

Plans for this year include reinstating the scorekeepers that were eliminated last year and adding flag football.

Youth ball registration no longer is being done online because the deadline has passed. Families can register youth at Monroe City Hall or by mail. For more information, call 384-9156.



~ The End . . . ~