

Busy Brains: New recreational campus

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Busy Brains Children's Museum plans to make Lake Villa's new recreational campus its home as Lake Villa moves ahead to raise funds to build a recreation complex at Longwood Centre Park.

"This will be a huge shot in the arm for Lake Villa," said Rich Coles, chairman of the Parks and Recreation Committee.

The plan for the recreation complex will be redesigned to accommodate the museum, which is requesting 12,000 square feet, with the ability to expand to 30,000 square feet within five years.

"We have been searching for a home for our museum for two years," said board President Alison Price. "We have a traveling exhibit, but we have been careful in selecting a permanent site. We wanted to be in central Lake County because we will pull from a wide area."

Price said the closest children's museums are in Milwaukee and Rockford. "Lake Villa is the perfect choice. "

The recreational complex and parking will be located on the northwest portion of the 50-acre park on Route 83 that also includes the Lehmann Mansion. Two football fields, a baseball field, a multi-use recreation area, a walking trail with exercise stations, a pavilion and public restrooms are also planned for the site.

Coles has enlisted some experienced fund-raisers from the community to help raise half of the projected \$3 million needed to build the complex. "We have been turned down twice for the OSLAD (Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development) grant, but we are going to try it again with the help of (former village trustee) Bud Osmond," said Coles.

Only two years old, the committee has outgrown all of the available space for holding recreational classes for children and adults in the community. The committee generates enough funds to take out a \$1.5 million revenue bond if needed to help fund the new facilities.

The two-story recreation complex will include meeting rooms and a multipurpose hall, a gym and running track, restrooms and offices. A future phase will include an indoor/outdoor aquatic center.

The building will be used for classes and programs sponsored by the parks committee. According to Coles, the recreation programs started two years ago with two classes and eight participants. "We now offer 124 classes with 371 participants. We have to turn people away and cancel classes because we don't have any more space," said Coles, adding that committee members beg, borrow and steal space for programs. "We desperately need this recreation building as soon as possible."

He said 70 percent of participants are Lake Villa residents with the remainder of the participants coming from other local municipalities including Lindenhurst, Antioch and the Round Lake area.

The committee has formed Friends of Lake Villa Parks and Recreation and has been granted 501c3 non-profit status with a board of directors that includes Cliff Ewert, Tom Myers, Mark Ring, Jerry Johnson, Lake Villa Mayor Frank Loffredo, Marty Gewke, David Brown, Robert Frank, Lou Lukemeyer and Tom Jennrich.

"We are just waiting for the letter to arrive granting us 501c3 status," said Coles.

"We realized early on that we could not even approach big corporate donors without 501c3 status," said Coles. In addition to offering corporate sponsorships, the committee will seek grants and foundation money to fund the recreation center. In addition to "naming rights," a company, organization or individual could sponsor one of the meeting rooms that range in price from \$27,000 to \$65,000, the multipurpose hall could be sponsored for \$250,000 or on the lower end of the price scale, and the picnic pavilion could be sponsored for \$10,000.

Playing field sponsors will pay \$30,000 for a football field or \$25,000 for the baseball field.

Sponsors will gain the benefit of prominent signage and recognition through the website, flyers and other promotional material, said

Tom O'Reilly, who is heading up the fund-raising effort.

A national corporate sponsor for the recreation center would have naming rights and it would retain that name for the lifetime of the building. Any formal reference to the building would include the sponsor. "Ultimately that sponsor will have a life time of positive community relations and good will with Lake Villa residents and the surrounding area," according to the promotional brochure.

Coles said a major fund-raising event will be held Nov. 16 at Lehmann Mansion to promote the sponsorship program to large donors. O'Reilly said he believes he has a major national corporate donor ready to make a significant donation. "That will open the doors to other big corporate sponsors," he said.

The timeline for the opening of the recreation center is 2008, which fits with the timeline for the Busy Brains Museum, said Coles. "This is going to be a perfect fit and a shot in the arm for Lake Villa."

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