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Nike Sports Complex Expansion Builds on Community's Legacy

Naperville City Council Approves Added Acreage for Sport, Recreation

NAPERVILLE, Ill. (April 21, 2010) – As a teenager growing up the 1950s, Naperville resident Jon Ripsky recalls watching with fascination as U.S. Army soldiers polished surface-to-air missiles on the property behind his family's home near Diehl and Mill Roads, known then as Nike missile battery site C-70.

Through the years, he's stood watch over the same property as his four children, and now grandchildren, participate in organized sports through the Naperville Park District's Nike Sports Complex.

"My kids all played baseball there," Ripsky says. "It's a great site to have for recreation and it's very well maintained. The park district's programs have been awesome for Naperville. My kids have used them since day one."

This week, the Naperville City Council voted to approve the planned expansion of the existing complex over an additional 20 acres, extending the property's use and value in a community that is no stranger to concepts of teamwork and service.

The existing 25-acre Nike Sports Complex sits on 14 acres that were once one of 18 U.S. Army Nike air defense system sites ringing the City of Chicago during the early years of America's Cold War, when fear was heightened that Soviets were targeting an atomic bomb raid on major metropolitan cities.

While citizens built bomb shelters in their back yards, the U.S. government constructed Nike missile and radar sites around 40 American cities nationwide. The sites were thought of as our nation's last line of defense.

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“They used to raise the missiles as a test every Tuesday morning,” Ripsky recalls. “The Nike property site is where the missiles were laid down into big holes in the ground, where the silos and actual mechanical workings of the missiles were housed.”

Naperville’s Nike Sports Complex is named for this military heritage but also for the Greek winged goddess Nike, or Nicé, a mythological spirit of victory both in battle and peaceful competition. A result of international treaty, the former defense system acreage was conveyed to the Naperville Park District in 1975 through a Federal Lands to Parks grant, which specifies that the land is to be used in perpetuity for public park and recreation purposes.

The remaining 11 acres were purchased in 1978 with grant assistance from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Ball and soccer fields were completed two years later. The Naperville Park District purchased the additional 20 acres in 2007 to address the community’s growing open space need on the north side of town. Its size, contiguous location to the existing complex and ease of accessibility make it an ideal site for expanded recreational and organized sport use.

Several thousand people use the existing Nike Sports Complex every year for organized play and recreation. With the approved expansion nearly doubling the facility’s existing size, new amenities will include the district’s first lighted, synthetic turf field and multi-use fields for soccer, football and lacrosse.

The Nike Sports Complex expansion also will include lighted courts for tennis, basketball and volleyball as well as a playground, walking and bicycle trails and one of two cricket pitches in Naperville. Professional landscaping and attention to environmental conservation will add to the site’s benefits.

“Nike is about competitive, fair play and team spirit,” says Eric Shutes, director of planning, Naperville Park District. “Thanks to the Naperville City Council and the community’s support, generations to come will learn these values on property that embodies this philosophy.”

The Nike Sports Complex expansion is based on resident feedback during the acquisition process, at several public meetings and from recommendations contained in

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the Open Space and Recreation Master Plan. One of the first steps in the project's development was installation of safety fencing and removal of trees and brush last fall.

Engineering plans were developed and the park site received positive recommendation from Plan Commission earlier this year, followed by City Council approval this week. Groundbreaking is anticipated this summer. An opening of the new Nike Sports Complex is targeted for 2011.

"It's important that this area is recognized," Ripsky says. "It was part of our national defense for years and it provides us with needed open space now."

For more information about the Nike Park Sports Complex expansion, call 630-848-5000 or visit www.napervilleparks.org. The Web site features news updates, site plan and frequently asked questions about the project. Please visit the Web site to also learn about Naperville Park District and its numerous public programs, organized youth sporting events, seasonal highlights and community services.

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About the Naperville Park District: *Created in 1966, the Naperville Park District is an independent, municipal agency serving the recreation needs of its residents. As a leader in providing leisure experiences that enhance the quality of life for the community, the District maintains and operates more than 2,500 acres with 130+ parks and facilities and provides more than 900 recreational, arts and environmental programs and special events annually. Included within the District's operations are two championship golf courses, a multitude of courts and sports fields, two inline skating and skateboarding facilities, the Millennium Carillon, a paddle boat quarry, historic Centennial Beach, and the beautiful Riverwalk.*