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## World Series lighting campaign begins; Detroit Tigers pledge \$20,000

Organizers of the Junior League World Series are trying to raise more than \$100,000 to install new lights on the Taylor baseball diamond that serves as a field of dreams for players from around the globe.

The Detroit Tigers Foundation thought “Light Up the Series” was such a bright idea that the nonprofit organization pledged \$20,000 to help get the job done.

The World Series will be played in Taylor’s Heritage Park for the 28th straight year in August. The international event – which is the “big brother” of the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Penn. – draws the best teams of 13- and 14-year-old baseball players from around the world.

Greg Bzura, the founder and director of the World Series, said new lights have been needed for years to replace the antiquated lighting system on World Series Field. Bzura said strong winds can reposition the current lights and cause havoc for players trying to catch fly balls during night games.

“Unfortunately, those lights are approaching a potential safety issue,” Bzura said. “They’re 23 years old. After 23 years of diligent maintenance, they are still facing eternal damnation.”

The Taylor South Little League operates the fields at Heritage Park for the city. In addition to the World Series games, the Junior League field is used during the regular season by all four Taylor Little Leagues, players from other communities and high school teams.

The new lights would cost about \$125,000 – less if World Series organizers can find volunteers to provide technical assistance and manual labor to install the new system.

Taylor South would contract with Musco Lighting, a company that is approved by Little League International. Bzura said Musco has installed lights at Comerica Park, on NASCAR tracks and at college and pro football fields.

Musco also prides itself on being “environmentally friendly,” Bzura said. Six new lights would replace the current eight-light system, reducing electricity costs by more than 50 percent. The old wooden poles would be replaced by poles made of galvanized steel.

“The lighting system is positioned in such a way get full benefit of the light,” Bzura said. “It doesn’t waste any light. We can do with six poles what we’re trying to do with eight.”

The new system includes 25 years of maintenance – a priority of a league made up of volunteers from the community.

To meet the financial obligation, World Series organizers have been seeking grants and corporate sponsors.

The \$20,000 grant from the Detroit Tigers Foundation was presented to Bzura on behalf of the Taylor South Little League during pre-game ceremonies of the Tigers’ May 25 game at Comerica Park. It was one of 11 pledges totaling more than \$160,000 from the foundation to various organizations.

The donation is actually a “challenge grant,” according to foundation Director Jordan Field, who made the presentation. He said the foundation’s Board of Directors is challenging World Series organizers to “leverage” the foundation’s pledge to raise the rest of the money to complete the project.

If the series volunteers raise the rest of the money, the foundation will award the grant “to satisfy the funding needed to complete the project.”

“The Detroit Tigers organization believes in the need to invest in our community’s future,” Field said. “We are honored to support such great organizations and are pleased that together we will enhance lives through the game of baseball.”

The foundation was established in 2005 with a focus on youth, education and recreation.

Bzura praised the World Series partnership with the Detroit Tigers, who provide tickets for games at Comerica Park for visiting series players, send Tigers to meet the players in Taylor, participate in opening ceremonies and provide publicity and additional credibility for the weeklong world tournament.

With the “follow the leader” grant provided by the Tigers, Bzura said he is hopeful the “Light Up the Series” campaign will be a success. Series organizers continue to seek other funding and sponsorship as well as volunteers to help offset some of the costs.

“If we don’t get the help, we have to raise \$125,000,” Bzura said. “If we don’t raise \$125,000, we will have to get loans. If we don’t make a commitment by December we lose that \$20,000.

“We are flat out fund-raising for this. Without the Tigers’ lead, this would not have happened. Their donation awakened us to the possibility that it could be done. We’ve raised an additional \$15,000 so far and we’re looking for corporate sponsorships.

“Ideally, we’d like to have the 2008 series under the new lights. However, our ultimate deadline is to place the order and have it installed by year-end.”

To donate funds or in-kind contributions to the “Light Up the Series” campaign, call Greg Bzura at (734) 306-3113 or send e-mail to [bgregbz@att.net](mailto:bgregbz@att.net).

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