

Opening ceremony set May 23 at Prospect Meadows

Written by Jim Ecker

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In the classic 1989 movie “Field of Dreams,” an Iowa farmer plows under a corn field and builds a real baseball field in its place when a mysterious voice whispers “If you build it, he will come.”

That was fiction, of course, but the real thing has been happening at Prospect Meadows. And instead of just one field that attracted legendary ghost players, Prospect Meadows will feature nine fields this year and a total of 17 fields when the project is finished in 2023.

Thousands and thousands of young folks – not ghosts like Shoeless Joe Jackson and Kevin Costner’s father -- will be getting a chance to play baseball and softball at the complex.

The Opening Day ceremonies and ribbon-cutting will be held on Thursday, May 23 at the sparkling new complex, which is located at the juncture of Highway 13 and County Home Road just north of Marion.

There will be a reception for invited guests at 3 p.m., with the ceremony at 4 p.m., a public open house that begins at 5 p.m. and ballgames on five of the fields at 5:30 p.m., including a game on the Miracle Field for people with special needs.

It’s taken almost 10 years to plan the facility, raise the funds and actually get it built, but Prospect Meadows is already being hailed as a first-class baseball and softball complex in Iowa.

Jack Roeder, the general manager at Prospect Meadows, was the GM of the Cedar Rapids

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Kernels when they opened their new ballpark in 2002 and helped oversee that project.

Roeder has spearheaded the drive to build Prospect Meadows since retiring from the Kernels in 2010, but he quickly passes credit to the generous donors, board of directors and all the other people who have helped with this enormous undertaking.

"Tim Strellner, who has served as the Vice President and Chair of the Fundraising Committee, has been nothing short of phenomenal in his efforts on behalf of the project", stated Roeder.

"Every successful team needs a roster of talented people who are winners," said Roeder. "The credit goes to all the members of our team who have dedicated themselves to making Prospect Meadows a reality."

"It's been a lot of work by a lot of people, but we're all looking forward to the Opening Day ceremonies with great excitement and quite frankly a sense of relief," stated Strellner. "Knowing that thousands of children of all ability levels will play baseball and softball is a testament to the efforts of so many, realizing by working together we could get this done".

The first event at Prospect Meadows will be happening as soon as the gates open. Perfect Game, which is the primary tenant of the new facility and a major donor, will be hosting the 2019 PG Memorial Day Classic from Friday, May 24 through Monday, May 27.

Jerry Ford, President of Perfect Game stated, "I am happy that Prospect Meadows will be opening this spring and we look forward to bringing in some of the top talent in the Midwest to showcase at the new facility".

In addition to weekend tournaments, there will be Night League Games for youth baseball and softball teams that begin the week of May 27.

The funding for the project has been a great collaboration of both public and private sectors.

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Marion, Linn County, Cedar Rapids and the State of Iowa have committed up to \$6 million dollars for Prospect Meadows.

In addition, large gifts from the Hall-Perrine Foundation, Perfect Game, Transamerica and the Marion Metro Kiwanis Club, plus many other private donors, have raised over \$6.5 million toward the project. And the Linn County Board of Supervisors made it all possible by granting Prospect Meadows a 95-year lease for the 128 acres of property at \$1 per year.

The naming rights for each of the eight regulation-size fields that are opening this year went for \$100,000 apiece. Seven of the eight fields have been named already, and the name of the eighth field will be unveiled on May 23 at the ceremony.

An iconic part of Prospect Meadows will be the Rotary Donor Wall, which is shaped like a big map of Iowa and designed like an American flag with red, white and blue stripes and baseballs. Families, businesses and friends can get their name on that Donor Wall for all posterity by purchasing a baseball or star on the wall.

Major grading and earthwork began in 2017. The official groundbreaking ceremony was held last summer. And now, after many years of hard work and tender loving care, it's finally time to Play Ball!