

Worthington ballpark recovers

BY DYLAN KURT

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You'd be hard-pressed to find a better-looking ball diamond in a community the size of Worthington.

If fact, you'd likely even have a more difficult time finding a town of 400 that could pay off a set of \$105,000 lights in under a year, but that's just what happened.

After a few downed poles and a wake-up call from pair of mighty windstorms, Worthington realized the old wooden light poles surrounding the ball diamond were a fairly large safety hazard. And after the city had the integrity of the remaining poles tested, it was suggested that they come down as soon as possible.

An ad hoc committee decided that they either needed to fork over the funds for new steel poles and lights, or just hold all of their games during the day, and it didn't take long for them to decide to shoot for the former, despite the expense.

"It was just amazing the willingness of people that wanted to donate and help out down here," said Gary Langel, a name synonymous with Worthington baseball and an integral hand in the project. "The donations just kept coming in and people just really wanted to help out."

By July 2016, just several months after the lighting contract was awarded to Biechler Electric, Langel said they already had just enough money to pay for the lights.

As a way to honor donors and make a little more money for other improvements at the park, Langel and Paul Engler, a man Langel



Dylan Kurt • Staff Photo

A tremendous fundraising effort has provided enough funds to pay for both the new lights and brick wall located near the entrance of the park.

hailed as a "super organizer," put their heads together to create a brick wall containing inscribed stones at the entrance of the park.

The wall, which was completed by Nauman Masonry late last week, was drawn up by Langel but sold to the public by Engler.

"I was down here the other night and there were a couple of cars here analyzing it," Langel said of the new monument. "Now that it's a reality, I think that people are pretty impressed with how it looks."

Engler, a former mayor of Worthington and business oriented person, was "invaluable" to the project and was the man in charge of keeping all the ducks in line and making sure what the donors want on their stone (names, company logos) was correct.

"Paul did all the leg work on (the wall) and he was coordinating with the Decker's with the engraving," said Langel. "So, there was a lot of emails being sent getting approvals."

Deckers, who run Big River Specialty, a custom engraving business in Bernard, also has a special tie to this project.

During the period, he was working on the engravings, Larry Decker suffered an unfortunate heart attack and died as a result. Langel said Decker was about half-way finished with the project when that happened, but Decker's son, Matt, finished the job for him.

The Loran and Susan Wolfe family, besides buying quite a bit of real estate on the wall, made an additional donation to the park

that Langel was quite excited about.

"They kind of came in late with their donation," said Langel, referencing that the lights had already been covered by that time. "But they still wanted to have something symbolic, so they donated a Toro diamond prep vehicle, and that was huge for us."

The new Toro, delivered around June, has been picking up most of the work formally done by the Kubota tractor that Brunkan Equipment donates for use to the field. The Kubota is still used whenever it's really muddy, Langel said.

The wall itself also sits on a four-foot deep concrete pad,

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Wall: Is complete in Worthington

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poured by D & S Lawncare, which was essential to the project.

"They told us if we built a brick structure like that without a footing, it could settle and change and then all of a sudden fall apart, and we obviously didn't want that," said Langel.

At the end of the day, many hands, almost too many to name, were involved in getting Worthington's park back up to snuff, and Langel credits the tight-knit community for the speed in which that happened.

"We have some really good volunteer help around here, not just for the light project or the wall project, we just got a really good group of local Worthington citizens that help out at this ballpark all the time," said Langel. "We take great pride in our park, that we keep it neat and up to date, but there's never a time when we don't have enough volunteers to take care of it."