



JANUARY 2018

## SUN LAKES SOFTBALL: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE?

By Larry Wolfe

As many Sun Lakes residents know, there is a possibility that the Field of Dreams softball complex may be converted into a large pickleball facility and a park with other amenities. This would, of course, have a major impact on the softball program. The Softball Association is not anti-pickleball or anti-park, but we would hope that a solution could be found to allow all amenities to co-exist.

A little background: The softball program was founded in 1985 with the first field on the corner of South EJ Robson Blvd. and Riggs Road. In 1988 a temporary field was located where the Baptist Church now stands at the corner of Dobson and Riggs Rd. The following year, our first “real field” was constructed where the Sun Lakes Library now stands. That field included dugouts, fencing, stands and a scorer’s booth. It was used from 1989 until 2002 when the current Field of Dreams was built by the developer. The Softball Association contributed \$20,000 toward the construction of the new clubhouse and solicited donations from area businesses for the fencing, dugouts and other items.

The softball program was established for all Sun Lakes residents, not any one “phase” and has been run by volunteers from all of Sun Lakes. Volunteers maintained the current Field of Dreams entirely until a couple years ago when the IronOaks HOA became involved. (The Field of Dreams became the property of the IronOaks HOA a few years ago when they purchased the golf courses and other amenities from Robson Communities.)

Over the years, the program has grown from one travel team, the Sun Lakes Blues, to now include eight men’s league teams, several age-group travel teams, a ladies team and a recreational program. The field is used on average about 240 days per year for all of these programs.

It has been suggested that our program could be relocated to Chandler’s Snedigar Park complex. There are several issues with that proposal. Field preparation and field rentals would likely exceed \$20,000 per year; the Snedigar Fields are designed for younger guys with much deeper outfield fences than the Field of Dreams; we would have no storage facility for our field equipment; we would have to transport equipment, protective screens, game balls, etc. from “wherever” to Snedigar 240 times per year.

Other issues include the significant cost of building the new complex (\$750,000 plus?), the significant noise problem from sixteen (or more?) pickleball courts and the impact on nearby homeowners, the potential for ruinous costly floods (the field is a drain-off area and in a flood plain: see the photo accompanying this article) and problems controlling access to an open park area “outside the gates.”

We feel that all IronOaks homeowners should have a vote in deciding this very significant issue. We also welcome input and suggestions from other Sun Lakes communities who also have a stake in the outcome. Sun Lakes softball started out as a dream...and culminated in the building of the Field of Dreams. Now the question is: Will the dream endure...?