

Our Field of Dreams

May 6th, 2009 • Category: [Around Town](#), [Departments](#) • Comments: [0](#)



Pat Donaldson and daughter, Ashley with Mike Brown and daughter, Sarah

Field of Dreams, adapted from the novel, Shoeless Joe by W.P. Kinsella, you have undoubtedly heard the now much used tag line, “If you build it, he will come.” It relates to an Iowa farmer who comes to believe that if he plows under his own corn fields and in its place puts a baseball field... then the players from the Chicago White Sox who allegedly “threw” the 1919 World Series will show up and have a place to play baseball. Ultimately, their spirits can finally rest in peace if this is done. Similar to this movie, Richmond Hill also has a ball field that was built on a dream. In this case, the team was already there...and they needed it built! And, as the story goes, this is how the Richmond Hill High School girls got a softball field that is beyond compare.

The field, located behind the high school, was started in 2001 and was completed in time for the 2002 Girls' Softball Season. Before that, it was just a dirt field and very little else. Now, it's an outstanding grass field, complete with dugout, press box with concession stand below, and foul ball nets that would rival those of any college. It is a source of pride for our community. What is even more amazing is that it was the vision of two local fathers.

Patrick ("Pat") Donaldson and Mike Brown knew that their respective daughters, Ashley and Sarah, were playing on a less than desirable field. "They were sitting on cinder blocks and overturned buckets and were always out in the elements," said Mike. The softball season runs July, August, and September each school year. The two fathers made the decision to coordinate and build the Girls' Softball Team a much deserved and needed field. Mike would handle the business end of things and Pat would be involved with the physical aspect of the building project.

Over the next year, many parents came to help and countless others made donations including materials and building supplies, but it has to be noted that these two men deserve special recognition for initiating this ambitious project. As fate would have it, one of the men had the good fortune of a "new neighbor moving in next door in 2001...who happened to an artist." Almost before Jim Leahy's bags were unpacked and his own art gallery opened, he was donating his amazing talents in assisting this effort. Good people always seem to find each other. Now, Jim's Wildcats adorn the high school and the girls' dugout. "Jim's work was far beyond what we expected," say both men.

Pat Donaldson, a retired Georgia Department of Corrections employee, still had some connections and reached out to the Georgia State Prison system for some "skilled labor." On Saturdays for a year, a handful of inmates were given the opportunity to maximize their sentences by helping in this noble endeavor. They undoubtedly remember their Saturdays at our high school as good ones. Among those brought by van

each week was a mason, a carpenter, and a painter. Georgia no longer allows the use of prisoners in work projects so their assistance came in the nick of time. “After a short time, I didn’t want to miss a weekend... then I would miss something. I didn’t want to miss one story or one joke,” added Mike.

The inmates got to make a difference outside the prison and got a great meal too at the end of each work day. Mike recalled that when they cooked steaks for the men, at one of the early weeks of construction, “One of the guys cried. He said it was the first steak he had tasted in fifteen years.” The men’s wives also brought food each week for the workers. “Even the dugout was framed by a local guy and the school’s custodian always made sure the mowing was done.” Pat acknowledged. The parents of the girls, who assisted in countless ways, and the team members themselves, who would even pick up trash at the end of each home game, received endless praise from both the fathers.

The men claim they “just wanted the girls to have a source of pride for the field they played on at home games.” Apparently, pride carried the team a long way because in 2002 the girls were in the regional championship. Pat Donaldson and Mike Brown both agree that they got so much more out of the effort than they put in. “People are great. All you have to do is just ask for help and they will provide it.”

The daughters of Pat Donaldson and Mike Brown graduated high school with the Richmond Hill High School class of 2003 and went on to further their educations. Similar to the movie, our story also has a happy ending. The softball field that came from a single vision of two fathers is still our own field of dreams. High five, gentlemen...it’s a Home Run! Here’s to all who choose to step up to the plate and make a difference.



Dugout art by Jim Leahy