

Soccer group, Little League get new fields

By MARY COPP-LEE
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The Silver Lake Soccer Club has been extra busy these days. Not only is the 200-member elite travel program participating in its fall soccer season, it has been readying its own new field.

The facility, behind the New Springville Little League complex on Forest Hill Road, will actually be on state land. It's believed this is the first time a Staten Island soccer league will have its own field.

The club, which received permission to use the land before the summer, has been

grading the property with a spring opening as its target.

"We had received a request from the Silver Lake Soccer Club for some land and we were happy we were able to provide them with a suitable area," said Robert Witkowsky, the director of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office that is part of the state of New York's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

"Because of the size of the plot, it appears we will also be able to include an extra baseball field for the New Springville

Little League in the package," added Witkowsky, who admittedly has a special place in his heart for youth sports.

"The site was perfect because there really were no trees that had to be cut down," he said. "All it needed was to be graded and seeded."

"Our office felt the area should be utilized and it was brought to our attention that these groups had a real need for it. However, the stipulation does exist that it is still our land and we could take it back if the state had another need for it."

This is not the first time Witkowsky's

office has come to the rescue. "Recently, we installed a small baseball field on a vacant lot near where they are building the new College of Staten Island in Willowbrook," said Witkowsky. "We used money raised for us from the Lowney Golf Tournament to put in the field and it is basically utilized by the Special Olympic program."

In the case of the Silver Lake Soccer Club and the New Springville Little League, the burden of creating and maintaining the respective fields will fall on

(See FIELDS, Page C 5)

Page 1
of 2

those groups. The two organizations will also have to provide their members with adequate insurance.

"We've had a lot of people donate their time and money to help prepare the site, but so much still has to be done," said Leonard D'Orazio, vice president of the Silver Lake Soccer Club, which has 11 teams with players 5 to 30 in age.

"We're still grading the land and we have to put down seed and install a sprinkler system," he said. "We're already looking into running some fund-raisers to help with the cost of these new endeavors."

While there is a lot of work involved, D'Orazio and company are just thrilled to have a place of their own.

"Land is so hard to come by and there is a real need on Staten Island for more soccer fields like

this one," said D'Orazio. "This land will give us the opportunity to have a more extensive training program and practice sessions. It will also solidify a place for home games without the time restraints."

At NSLL, the thought of an extra field was met with just as much enthusiasm.

"Our league enrollment has been steadily increasing year after year and it's showing in that now some of our teams are starting to enjoy success in all-star competition," said Nino Crivello, the NSLL's newly elected president. "This field (it will be NSLL's fifth) will allow us to schedule more games and allow more of our teams to practice here. It appears we'll have room for a small Major field (about 200-foot fences) and we're prepared to enclose the area right upon the field's completion."

Witkowski said the New Springville site was the last parcel of land that his office had that

could be used for extra ballfields. "We really do not have any more sizeable lots that are not covered with trees like this left," said Witkowski. "We've always had a good relationship with the (New Springville) Little League and we feel the Silver Lake Soccer Club will also prove to be a good neighbor."

The SLSC is already trying to make that a reality.

"We'd like to give a little something back to the state and Mr. Witkowski's office in particular," said D'Orazio. "Once we're set up at the new field, we're planning on having some special soccer clinics and programs for the handicapped and disabled. It would be a great experience for all involved."

If anyone would like to make a donation or volunteer their time to help with the construction of the Silver Lake Soccer Club's new field, Leonard D'Orazio can be reached at 494-6029.

Page 2 of 2