



The Bedford Quarterly



Winter 2022

A Message from President Brady

Dear Residents,

As we enter the Christmas season, we reflect on 2022. We greatly appreciate the efforts of our residents, the business community, and our staff in working with the Village Board in confronting the major issues we faced in 2022. First, the Early Retirement Incentive (“ERI”) we agreed with our unions to offer our employees brought about major changes in our personnel. It allowed many staff members in the 50 to 55 age group to retire early and to hire new staff members. The biggest change was in the Fire Department. We did face challenges in hiring new staff but that issue seems to be resolved through the efforts of Chief Johnson and Deputy Chief Murray. Because of the large number of staff we had in the 50-55 age group, we were able to face the retirement issue sooner. The ERI allowed employees the option to retire early and the Village to save money in the future. Police and Fire personnel in most communities in Illinois can retire at 50.

Second, we have completed the first year of operations at the Wintrust Sports Complex. The facility is doing better than the financial pro forma estimated for year one. We are doing well with future bookings. The Under Armour Basketball tournament and the July 4th Corn Hole Tournament were broadcasted nationally on ESPN from the facility.

Third, with hopefully the end of the pandemic, we continue to do well with our finances and new developments in the business community. Hotel tax revenues have exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The stability of our finances allows the Village Board to continue our residential rebate program and to keep our tax level below inflation levels. We initiated a hotel study by the Concord Group which shows the Village can handle another 300-hotel rooms due to development of the Wintrust Sports Complex, in addition to the 1,600 that currently exist. There are three developers working with us for possible new sites. Home Depot has opened a new logistics center on Belt Railroad property. We have a major manufacturer looking at another site on that property. Kindly recall, the Belt Railroad yard is the largest in North America and third largest in the world. Logistics is very important to businesses in the Village. It looks like all properties on Cicero Avenue will now be occupied. Segments for a recent episode for Chicago PD were filmed in the industrial area. We are working to get more shows filmed in Bedford Park.

Fourth, the development of the new homes in the residential area has brought in new updated homes and new families into the Village. We now have over 10% of our homes built in the last 6 years. The Village has not seen this growth since the 1950’s. The amount of young people has increased. It appears that Walker School will return to a K through 5th grade format.

We still face issues with future water distribution, the Adult Entertainment facility, and the safety issues prevalent in the Chicago area. Kindly recall, Bedford Park is one of the top four distributors of Lake Michigan water in the Chicago area distributing water to the southwest suburbs. The Bedford Park District and Bedford Park Library are separate governing bodies from the Village but have done a great job of updating their programs and improving their facilities.

On a personal note, during 2022, I faced the issues of rehabbing from my leg injuries and the loss of my mother. The support that I received from fellow residents was tremendous and greatly appreciated. We tend to have our disagreements in the Village but in times of need we all come together. We have a great Village Board that works together with the residents as our top priority. Happy Holidays and thank you for a great 2022 and continuing to keep Bedford Park better.

Respectfully,

David R. Brady

David R. Brady
Village President

Gated Community Ideas

1. All four streets would be gated off Archer. The traffic flow on all four streets would remain the same. The gates would match the existing fencing around the Village.
2. Residents would receive a transponder for each car registered with the Village. A code can also access the gate. The code would change on a weekly basis. Residents would also be given two additional transponders for frequent visitors.
3. Pedestrian and/or bicycle traffic would continue in the existing manner.
4. An additional road would be built on the Village easement behind the Village Hall connecting 67th Street from the Village Hall and the parking area for the park and school. A roundabout for school traffic including school buses to drop off and pick up students would be added. This would be tied into a new entrance planned by District 104 for Walker School.
5. A gated road would be built to connect Bridgeview Gardens and the Park District at 77th Avenue. Bridgeview Garden residents only would be given a transponder and the code for this road.
6. Gates would have a call box that would be manned remotely to handle residential deliveries and guests approved by residents.
7. As part of the project, the Village would provide for construction for an ongoing water retention issue for the Park District and tie in a pickleball court for the park. The school would be given additional parking. These projects would be subject to approval of the gated community.
8. Any homes that have frequent guests because of a business would not be affected due to the code system.

There will be no additional costs to residents on this. This is a complicated issue in which we appreciate everyone's study of the issue before participating in the survey. The Village Board will remain neutral in the issue until the survey is completed.

Village Clerk's Office

Yvette Zavala, RMC

Fiber to the Home



With a lot of residents working from home and students learning remotely, the Village Board approved to upgrade the internet fiber to a higher speed. Should you ever experience any issues with your internet, call Kraus Solutions (815) 478-4000, option 2 for 24/7 Tech Support. You can also send an email to support@aekraus.com.

Congratulations on your Retirement!!!

Thank you for your service!

Ken Adent	John Holloway	John Litkenhus	Mark Peterson
Louis Baggio	Mark Kaminski	Sean Maloy	Konstantine Plakias
George Brunsluk	Linda Kawulia	Paul Miraldi	Kurt Raber
Tom Cerney	James Kirkolis	Kevin Mitchell	James Retusnic
Rich Chaput	Tim Kolinek	Mike Nogajewski	Rick Symonds
Wayne Clark	Glenn Kosieniak	Greg Palmer	Bill Thomas
Melody Elmer	Marty Lacny	Harry Parks	Rick Welcome
Tim Griffin	Adrienne Larson	Tom Pollard	Aaron Wright
Victor Honsik	Mike Leach	Jerry Ponio	

Welcome Aboard 2022 New Hires !!!!

Alaina Battaglia	Jacob Litkenhus	Ryan Ryk
Jeffrey Braun	Jordan Lupo	Kady Sassenger
Keaton Coleman	Nick Lupo	Brian Staatz
Rory Doss	Erika Maloney	William Stripek
Jerek Dyson	Anthony	Mark Webb
Julia ElSousa	Marcuccelli	
Saahil Gilani	Mason Perecich	
Josh Griffin	Seth Phillips	
Daniel Johnson	Dylan Razez	

Village Finances

Marilyn Curnutte

Chief Administrative Officer - Finance

Village finances remain strong. We were faced with reduced revenue streams due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, but we worked together to reduce expenditures across departments, increased existing revenue and created new revenue streams. These efforts allowed us to end 2021 with a surplus and implement a balanced budget for 2022.

The General Fund provides resources for nearly all day-to-day operations of the Village such as police, fire, public works, residential services, and administration. Personnel costs make up the largest piece of the general fund expenditure budget, 62% for 2022. Our public safety departments are comprised of mostly people. For example, the 2022 Fire Department budget is 92% personnel costs. The majority of these services are funded by tax collections such as property tax, sales tax, and hotel tax, along with permit and license fees and charges for services.

For 2022, property tax revenue makes up 39% of the Village's \$36 million general fund budget. The Village receives these funds from Cook County as property owners pay their bi-annual property tax bills. Normally this would occur in March and August of each year. With the delay of the 2nd installment, about 50% of this revenue may not be received until the end of December or even into 2023. The Village has seen greater than anticipated increases in sales tax and hotel tax collections that will offset any property tax collection delays. In addition, the Village keeps an adequate reserve balance on hand for any unforeseen circumstances.

Sales tax revenue accounts for 21% of our general fund budget. Sales tax revenue continues to grow each year. The annual sales tax revenue as of October 2022 is 15% more than the same period last year. This is due to higher prices and pent-up consumer demand, but it is also in part due to the "Leveling the Playing Field for Illinois Retail Act" which was enacted in 2021. In short, leveling the playing field requires remote retailers (meeting certain requirements) to now remit sales tax at the state and local level based on the location where the products are delivered. This means we are now collecting sales tax from online retailers such as Google, eBay, and Uber Eats.

Hotel tax revenue collections are 16% of our general fund budget. The pandemic had the greatest impact on our hotel tax collections. At the height of the pandemic, only 3 of the 11 hotels in our town were open for operations and revenue was down more than 50%. As of October 2022, we are not only back to pre-pandemic levels, but exceeding 2019 collections. Not only has business travel picked up but the Village owned Wintrust Sports Complex has hosted numerous out of town tournaments resulting in more people renting rooms at our local hotels.

The water fund remains solid. The Village continues its discussions with the City of Chicago and Illinois American Water to increase the capacity of water purchased from Chicago and distributed to new customers.



Fire Department

Daniel Johnson

Fire Chief



Winter Safety Reminders from The Bedford Park Fire Department



The Bedford Park Fire Department would like to remind you to take the necessary safety precautions regarding shoveling snow and dealing with the cold and ice our winters can bring. According to the National Safety Council, shoveling snow is responsible for as many as 100 deaths and thousands of injuries each year.

Knowing ways to prevent injuries while shoveling or snow blowing is important. Remember to:

- **Stretch.** Stretching warms up your body and helps prevent muscle strains when done in proper form.
- **Use proper form.** Be sure to use your knees when shoveling or lifting rather than your back. Squat down with your legs apart, back up straight and knees grounded.
- **Push snow rather than lifting it.** Never throw snow to the side or behind you since you could get hurt while twisting.
- **Take your time!**



Fire Department

Daniel Johnson
Fire Chief



- **Get outside as soon as you can.** Shovel when snow is fresh as it is easier to clear than when wet, compact snow. Shovel after every few inches of accumulation.
- **Seniors - Contact the Village Hall to ensure those who qualify are on the list for snow removal.**

Free Smoke Alarm Program from The Bedford Park Fire Department

According to Fire Chief Dan Johnson, “Our goal is to make sure our residents have the protection of working smoke alarms in every single home in Bedford Park.” The Bedford Park Fire Department is working cooperatively, with the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance and Office of the State Fire Marshal, to provide free smoke alarms to all residents of Bedford Park. ***The Be Alarmed! Smoke Alarm Installation Program*** provides smoke alarms and fire prevention materials to both educate residents on fire safety, as well as, to provide them with life-saving devices in their home.

Beginning January 1, 2023, the Bedford Park Fire Department will be offering free home safety visits to all Village residents by appointment. The home safety visit includes a short home safety survey to prevent home fires as well as to ensure there are working smoke alarms properly installed in all homes. Firefighters will then install 10-year sealed battery smoke alarms in each bedroom, near sleeping areas, and on each level of the home. All smoke alarms are required to be installed by our firefighters. Residents can schedule their home safety visit and smoke alarm installation by calling 708-563-4510 ext. 103.



Police Department

Tom Hansen
Police Chief



GREETINGS FROM THE BEDFORD PARK POLICE DEPARTMENT:

ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON!

NEWS:

- The Bedford Park Police Department would like to congratulate its members that retired in 2022 (Detective-Sergeant Mike Nogajewski, Patrol Officer Aaron Wright, Patrol Officer Thomas Pollard, and 9-1-1 Coordinator Adrienne Larson). We thank them for their years of service.
- The Department has hired five (5) new Patrol Officers this year (Officers Staatz, Gilani, Sassenger, Coleman, and Phillips). Officers Staatz and Gilani have successfully completed the Bedford Park Police Department Field Training Program, while Officers Sassenger, Coleman, and Phillips are currently assigned to this training program. The Department has also hired Erika Maloney as a Records Clerk/Administrative Assistant. Welcome to all the new employees.
- The Police Department continues to maintain open communication and discussions with the Wintrust Sports Complex in a joint effort to employ the best possible security practices at the facility in order to keep all patrons and staff members safe.
- The Police Department has recently installed three automated license plate reading cameras near Cicero Avenue to assist with criminal investigations. These cameras have been effective in other jurisdictions in assisting Investigators as they work solve criminal cases.

TIPS TO AVOID HOLIDAY SCAMS:

- Be aware of a practice commonly referred to as “Porch Piracy”. Porch Piracy is used to refer to people who steal packages from other people’s homes. Many of these crimes are crimes of opportunity, meaning that a person takes advantage of a possibility that is presented to them, in this case, delivered packages left by your front door.



Police Department

Tom Hansen
Police Chief



- To minimize your risk of falling victim to a Porch Pirate, consider the following:
 - ◆ When possible, request that the delivery company hold your package at their closest pickup facility until you can pick it up.
 - ◆ When making a purchase online, see if you can choose a specific delivery window. If purchasing from a large retailer, consider having your package delivered to a local store for pickup instead.
 - ◆ Have packages delivered to a location where they can be received in-person (such as the home of a neighbor or relative).
 - ◆ Request a signature confirmation of delivery to prevent packages from being left when no one is home and able to sign for them.
 - ◆ Provide delivery instructions so packages can be left out of sight and remain hidden from your yard or the road.
 - ◆ Take advantage of deliver alerts so you can be notified when a package arrives at your home.
 - ◆ Consider purchasing a home video doorbell and/or home security cameras.
- To minimize your online risk during the holiday season, consider the following tips:
 - ◆ Do not click any suspicious links or attachments in emails, on websites, or on social media. Phishing scams and similar crimes get you to click on links and give personal information like your name, password, and bank account number. In some cases, you may unknowingly download malware to your device.
 - ◆ Be especially wary if a company asks you to update your password or account information. Look up the company's phone number on your own and call the company to verify the request.

VEHICLE BURGLARY PREVENTION TIPS:

- The Bedford Park Police Department wants to remind all residents to remain vigilant in protecting their vehicles and property during the holiday season.
- Consider these tips:
 - ◆ Do not leave valuables in your car. If you leave valuable items in your car, your car automatically becomes a target.
 - ◆ If you must leave valuable items in your car while out and about, place items out of sight or in the trunk.
 - ◆ Once home, unload your valuables immediately. Do not store valuables in your car any longer than necessary, and certainly not overnight.
 - ◆ Try to park in busy, well-lighted areas, or in your garage (if you have one).
 - ◆ Close your windows and LOCK ALL OF YOUR DOORS!! Do this even if you plan to be away from your car for only a brief time. Most vehicle burglaries are committed on cars that have unlocked doors.
 - ◆ If you have one, set your car's anti-theft device alarm. Many people believe that car alarms no longer make a difference, but they can be an effective deterrent to a vehicle burglary.
 - ◆ Don't think your dark tinted windows will hide your valuables. Thieves often use flashlights to see through the tint.

GUEST PARKING / OVERNIGHT PARKING REMINDER:

Overnight parking between 1:00am to 6:00am on the Village residential streets will be limited to vehicles that have a current Village vehicle sticker, vehicles that have a temporary parking pass displayed, or vehicles that have been authorized and logged through the Police Department's Frontline PSS web portal. Each residential address will be limited to 21 single-night occurrences of overnight guest parking between July 1st and June 30th. If you have reached your 21-night limit, you will receive a hand-delivered letter from the Police Department advising of such. **Any violations of the overnight parking after 21 occurrences will result in a citation being issued.** Overnight parking in the "North-40" parking lot behind the Historical Building (I&M Canal Visitor facility) will be limited to vehicles displaying a Village vehicle sticker, a temporary parking pass, or properly logged in the Frontline PSS web portal. There is no nightly limit of overnight guest parking in this parking lot.

Water Department

Chris Lesniak
Superintendent

As water becomes more scarce to towns that are still on wells, the Village continues to try and expand to other municipalities as well as work with the current ones to provide the best quality water and give the best rates we can. We also partnered up with other municipalities and the City of Chicago, together we are hoping to reduce the cost of water for all. With the current infrastructure, we can continue to be a top water user in Illinois for years to come. We are always looking to improve our system so we can expand to provide water to whomever may need it.

Infrastructure updates

The Village strives to keep its water system running smoothly and modernized. Currently, we are in the process of upgrading our Old Harlem pump station with a new 750kw generator and an upgraded VFD drive system. Due to the aging power grid we tend to lose both sources of power during bad wind/snowstorms. With a completion date of next December, the Village will then be equipped with a generator at every station which will ensure we can keep the water flowing during any type of outage.



We are also in the process of upgrading from the current VFD drive system to new technology that will run everything much more efficient. This will allow us to have more control over the system making it easier for us to run for decades to come.

Another project on the industrial side of town is the replacement of the current water meters with new MACH 10 ultrasonic meters. These meters are considered to be a no-moving part meter with greater accuracy and less chance of failures.

Water facts

- **3% of the earth's water is freshwater. 1.2% of that can be used as drinking water and the rest is in the form of glaciers, ice caps, and permafrost.**
- **The human body is made up of 66% water.**
- **The average American family uses 320 gallons of water per day, about 30% of which is devoted to outdoor use.**

WINTER TIPS Check outdoor hose bibs for leaks or freezing. Know where your shutoff valves are. Check for leaks after the thaw. Let the faucet slowly drip if your going to be away on vacation for an extended period of time.

Chairs on Current and Projected Village Committee

Water / Veterans:	Terry J. Stocks
Finance / New Residents:	Nancy A. Wesolowski
Public Works / Beautification:	Gail P. Rubel
Police / Seniors:	Anthony W. Kensik
Policy / Education:	Dr. Thomas Pallardy
Fire / Clearing Industrial Association:	Katrina M. Errant
David R. Brady:	Southwest Council of Mayors Vice President Southwest Council of Mayors Transportation Chair Midway Noise Committee Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) – Executive Transportation Board

Marketing & Economic Development

Joe Ronovsky

Chief Business Officer, Marketing & Economic Development

WINTRUST **SPORTS COMPLEX** **AT BEDFORD PARK**

The Wintrust Sports Complex at Bedford Park recently began its second year of operation, highlighted by some major weekend volleyball and basketball tournaments sponsored by household names such as ESPN, Under Armour, American Cornhole League, and the Illinois Basketball Hall of Fame. On any given weekend, approximately 7,000 people will cycle through our facility. We view the Wintrust Sports Complex as the front door to Bedford Park, on pace to host some 200,000 people annually.

The Wintrust Sports Complex has been a catalyst for continued economic development in Bedford Park, especially our hotels at 65th and Cicero. We have seen hotel revenues peak to record highs coming out of the pandemic during our tournament weekends. We only have a few open tournament weekends from now until late summer 2023. Our research has also indicated that with the addition of the Wintrust Sports Complex and the people we are bringing into town, we have demand high enough to possibly add another hotel in the village. Conversations are on-going for future developments on-site at 65th and Central. We're seeking businesses in this area that would compliment our efforts with the sports complex and would serve the needs of the high volume of people visiting us.

As part of our business development plan, we have secured a naming rights partner in Wintrust Financial, a pouring rights partnership with Coca-Cola and Goose Island, and a video poker gaming partnership with Accel Entertainment that is located on the second floor of the Wintrust Sports Complex. Come check it out and support our partners.

Our efforts also allowed us to partner with Advent Health (LaGrange & Hinsdale Hospital) to offer free athletic physicals to some 500 athletes participating in Special Olympics Illinois in Bedford Park. Special Olympics Illinois has found a permanent home with us as well, naming the Wintrust Sports Complex their "Official Indoor Training and Competition Site." We look forward to seeing these athletes and their families visit and compete in Bedford Park approximately 50 times each year.

The Wintrust Sports Complex and the Village have also developed relationships with the University of Illinois Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism and the Chicago Southland Visitors and Convention Bureau to provide us with real time data on best practices for use of our facility that will lead to significant, first of its kind programming, research, revenue, and special events. These groups will also allow us to develop local programming that will be offered in the future to Bedford Park residents. We have started to offer pickleball and bingo and are working towards adding new programming in the upcoming year based on your feedback. Please reach out if you have any suggestions or ideas of what we can offer you and your family.

At the Wintrust Sports Complex

Bar & Restaurant: Open Thursday – Sunday starting at 11am. Weekend hours vary based on tournament schedules, but typically the kitchen is open until 9pm. Stop by and show your resident promotional card to receive 50% off your food and drink order upstairs.

Birthday Parties: We can customize birthday party packages for our residents. Please reach out to Jennifer Quinlan to book your next party at jquinlan@sportsfacilities.com or 708-295-9503

Family Entertainment (Arcade, Laser Tag, E-Sports): Monday – Friday 5-9pm. Weekend hours vary, but generally 11am-9pm. Call ahead before your visit to check availability.

Wintrust Bank: As part of our partnership with Wintrust Financial, a personal banker has been assigned to serve the needs of all Bedford Park residents. Our personal banker also has access to provide you with non-advertised savings, checking and loan promotions or needs. Please feel free to contact Lara Al-Ali for all your personal banking needs. She can be reached at LAlAli@bankoaklawn.com or 708-422-3605.

For any additional questions, suggestions or ideas please reach out to Joe Ronovsky at jronovsky@villageofbedfordpark.com or 708-295-4209



WINTRUST[®]

SPORTS COMPLEX

AT BEDFORD PARK



Main Lobby



Gymnasium



Redemption Arcade



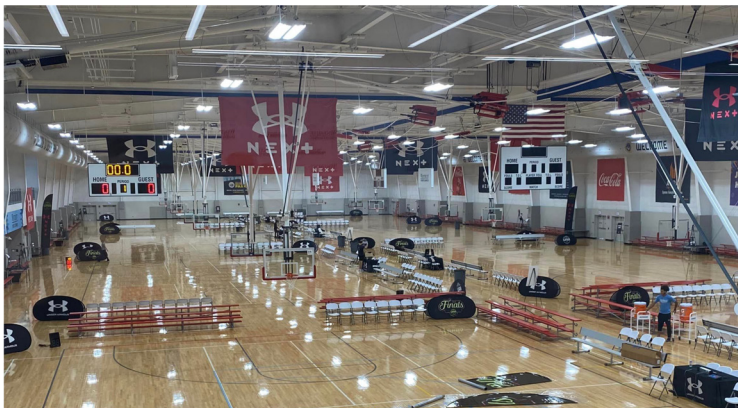
E-Sports Gaming Room



Restaurant/Bar Overlooking Courts



Concessions





Bedford Park Welcomes Special Olympics Illinois to Indoor Training

Wintrust Sports Complex is the "Official Indoor Training and Competition Site" for Special Olympics Illinois in the Village of Bedford Park.

Posted Wed, Oct 26, 2022 at 4:15 pm CT

More than 100 United Airlines volunteers were on hand to welcome Special Olympic Illinois athletes to Wintrust Sports Complex for a day of floor hockey training. (Figel Public Relations)

Village of Bedford Park President David Brady helped facilitate discussions with local Special Olympic Illinois' regional directors that led to this partnership announcement. (Figel Public Relations)

October 2022 – Bedford Park, IL -- Special Olympics Illinois and the Village of Bedford Park are pleased to announce that beginning in October 2022 the Wintrust Sports Complex will be the "Official Indoor Training and Competition Site" for Special Olympics Illinois.

"This partnership allows Special Olympics Illinois to utilize the Wintrust Sports Complex for year-round training and competition for athletes with intellectual disabilities in the Chicagoland area," announced Dave Breen, Special Olympic Illinois President and CEO.

"The need is greater by the day to increase Special Olympic programming in Chicago and its outlying suburbs," said Breen. "Our gratitude goes out to the Village of Bedford Park officials and the Wintrust Sports Complex for recognizing this need and opening the doors to our hundreds of athletes."

The Wintrust Sports Complex is a multi-purpose sports tourism and entertainment facility open to elite athletes as well as local families. The modern, spacious venue is versatile enough to host large youth sports tournaments, trade shows and local family events and programming. It also features a large Bar & Restaurant, Family Arcade, Laser Tag Zone and E-Sports Lounge.

Village of Bedford Park President David Brady helped facilitate discussions with local Special Olympic Illinois' regional directors that led to this partnership announcement.

"Bedford Park's opportunity to host such vital programming is a blessing for all involved," said President Brady. "The Wintrust Sports Complex has harvested good business and good will and we continue to believe in building a better future for our kids and for our community."

Beginning with a focus on Special Olympics' indoor sports, sessions at the Wintrust Sports Complex will include practice and competitions in floor hockey, basketball, volleyball, and Unified Sports basketball. "Our community members will embrace the significance of Unified Sports, which will inspire even greater support for Special Olympic Illinois programming," said President Brady. "We are all thrilled for the opportunity to host Illinois Special Olympic athletes this coming year."

Special Olympics Illinois' mission includes growing its "inclusive" efforts throughout Chicagoland in coordination with Special Olympics North America Unified Champion City Schools (UCCS), which brings a focused approach to amplify the essential elements of Unified Champion Schools (UCS) within city school districts. UCS utilizes three interconnected components for social inclusion in schools:

- Special Olympics Unified Sports® (joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team)
- Inclusive Youth Leadership (when young people of all abilities are given opportunities to be leaders in their schools and communities)
- Whole-school engagement (creates a school climate that fosters understanding and respect for all and can influence how students think and act within and beyond the school)

Currently, less than 10% of current Chicago schools are offering Unified programming. Special Olympics Illinois plans to implement the UCCS initiative by engaging in new collaborations while expanding on the success of existing partnerships.

In addition to hosting training and championship competition, the Wintrust Sports Complex will also host MedFest, which provides approximately 1,000 free annual sports physicals to the competing athletes. Since its inception, MedFest has directly helped Special Olympics reach almost 22,000 athletes in the Chicagoland Area.



Basketball Museum of Illinois inches closer to becoming reality with home found in Bedford Park

MAY 9, 2022 — BY DON CRIM, SENIOR COLUMNIST

NORMAL, Ill. — Bruce Firchau was known as a “fixer” during his 38-year basketball coaching career, taking downtrodden programs and turning them into winners. His 557 career victories, mostly at schools in northern Illinois, and 2007 induction into the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame are testaments to the success he achieved. His biggest victory, however, will be turning the dream of a museum to preserve and tell the stories of the long, rich history of basketball in Illinois into reality.

And he believes it is finally within his grasp.

Firchau announced during the annual IBCA Hall of Fame banquet April 30 on the campus of Illinois State University that the IBCA and the Basketball Museum of Illinois have entered a partnership with Wintrust Sports Complex and Village of Bedford Park to develop such a site.

Bedford Park sits on the southwest corner of the Chicago city limits, near Midway Airport and minutes from downtown. The Wintrust Sports Complex is a gleaming \$35 million facility that opened last fall. It features 100,000 square feet of indoor volleyball and basketball courts, conference rooms, a family entertainment center with laser tag, arcade games, esports lounge and bar and restaurant.

There were more than 140 volleyball teams playing in a tournament the first weekend it was open. An AAU basketball tournament the last weekend of April drew more than 5,000 visitors to the complex. And, if all goes as planned, it will someday soon will be home to the Basketball Museum of Illinois.

“It brings everything to the table we wanted and then some,” said Firchau, chairman of the Basketball Museum of Illinois, a nonprofit organization. “We always wanted a place where we could be interactive, and event driven.” Initiatives this year include the installation of a limited amount of memorabilia along the complex’s hallways, hosting coach and player clinics, development of Leadership Academy events, speaking engagements and the creation of a virtual Hall of Fame experience.

Two, 55-inch touchscreen monitors will be installed in high-traffic areas in the complex, enabling users to get a taste of Illinois’ basketball history. “We can put up a lot of graphic arts displays to show that we are coming,” Firchau said. “We can give them some appetizers to visualize, see and read.”

The journey, which began more than a decade ago and has featured a series of starts and stops and disappointments, is not complete. The Basketball Museum of Illinois must still raise an estimated \$3 million to \$5 million over the next several years to operate and sustain a facility long term. And fundraising has always been the primary stumbling block.

“We’re teachers and coaches and we’re very good at our craft,” Firchau said of members of his organization. “But that did not give us the skills necessary to get inside philanthropic circles. There were times when we would take a step forward and then a step or two backward.

“Now we have an ally to help us (Bedford Park) and a facility that is a real jewel (to sell to potential donors). It opens some real possibilities for us.” Many potential standalone museum sites across the state have been considered since the quest began, including Centralia, Champaign and Quincy.

COVID-19 brought efforts to a screeching halt. Firchau said his group used that time to conduct internal studies to reassess its objections and study what was happening to other museums in the wake of the pandemic, many of which have since fallen to the wayside. The group concluded a standalone museum was no longer feasible. It had to be a destination for more than history, which the Wintrust Sports Complex provides.

Moreover, while exhibits displaying photos, uniforms, basketballs, trophies, old scoreboards and popcorn machines, film archives and the like would appeal to many, there also needed to be a greater interactive element to entice younger people. Accomplishing that meant finding a partner in a high-traffic area, acquiring help to build and market a virtual site, and getting assistance in fundraising.

Enter the Wintrust Sports Complex and Bedford Park.

“We knew they were building a huge sports complex, but that’s about all we knew,” Firchau said. “We first met with them in late fall when they were getting ready to open and probably met five or six times overall. Their architect met with our museum designer. “With all the youth coming through (the complex), we saw it as a real possibility. And it would be a two-way street. We could help them bring more people to the complex.”

The Basketball Museum of Illinois already has recorded 70 oral histories, including several with ties to Quincy basketball. It has artifacts it can eventually rotate and display. The goal is to highlight the basketball history of every county in the state, from junior high to the pros, boys and girls, men and women. “What we have in terms of displays is the tip of the iceberg,” Firchau said. “We will have an avalanche of memorabilia once we have a physical site. You’re talking about 120 years of history.”

For now, the Basketball Museum of Illinois appears closer to becoming a reality than perhaps it ever has. Work remains — hard work in fact — but for the first time in a long time Firchau believes he can see the finish line. “We have traveled all over trying to promote the idea of wanting a museum,” Firchau said. “Our tradition is too rich not to have one. Those who have stayed with us, our more than 1,500 grassroots donors, have shown faith in us. They helped keep this thing alive.

“For me, personally, it’s like a gorilla has been lifted off my shoulders. The journey has stretched out years and years. I really felt like I was letting the state down by not getting the project done.

“I was very successful as a coach, but sometimes you have to learn from your failures. You have to or you won’t be successful in the long run. We’ve learned from our failures. We want to show people we are for real.”




THURSDAY GAMES
January 5 - February 23, 2023

6:00-9:00pm

Boys & Girls, 3rd-12th
*Teammate requests made during registration

Wintrust Sports Complex
5499 W 65th St, Bedford Park, IL 60638

\$99 Per Player



- ✦ 16-minute games
- ✦ Each team plays 3 games per night, 24 total games
- ✦ Recommended team size is 4-6 players
- ✦ League Shirt Included



SWARM-BASKETBALL.COM/CHICAGO
REGISTRATION DEADLINE DECEMBER 23rd



Pickleball
EVERY THURSDAY STARTING
OCT 6th*

WINTRUST SPORTS COMPLEX
AT BEDFORD PARK

JOIN US FOR PICKLEBALL
AT WINTRUST SPORTS COMPLEX
9:00AM-12:00PM
\$5 PER PERSON - WALKUPS ONLY

ENJOY 20% OFF AT STATION GRILLE
DURING PICKLEBALL THURSDAYS!

*SUBJECT TO COURT AVAILABILITY

5499 W. 65TH STREET
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