

Game on at Baker Field

Cal Ripken Jr. helps Boys & Girls Club celebrate it new youth sports complex

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Baker Field, a multipurpose youth sports complex named for its major donors, Patty and Jay Baker, has opened at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County. The facility was made possible with the Bakers' gift through The Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation.

The Bakers and Cal Ripken Jr. were on hand to celebrate the grand opening earlier this month.

"When we started the foundation 11 years ago, we wanted to help kids and pay tribute to our dad," Mr. Ripken, an MLB hall of famer and co-founder of the foundation, says. "However, we never imagined we would be able to do so much for youth across the country.

"Without people like Jay and Patty Baker, this would not be possible," he adds. "Because of their support, hundreds of kids in Naples will benefit from this marvelous field."

Mr. Baker served as a board member of the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation since 2008 and was named chairman of the board in June. Last February, the Bakers received the Cal Ripken Sr. Award at the eighth annual Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation Aspire Gala in honor of their philanthropic efforts.

The \$1.5 million Baker Field will support not only the Ripken Foundation's baseball and softball programs but also other youth sports programs such as soccer and flag football.

"Our youth will come to Baker Field not only to learn and enjoy the great games of baseball, softball and Quickball but they will also achieve good character and citizenship through the Badges for Baseball program," Theresa Shaw, presi-



Cal Ripken Jr. and Theresa Shaw, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County.



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Patty Baker cheers and Jay Baker heartily approves as Cal Ripken Jr. cuts the ribbon at Baker Field.



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Cal Ripken Jr. pitches to Persia Cooper on opening day of Baker Field at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County.

dent and CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County, says.

A grant from the Naples Children & Education Foundation will help fund Baker Field programs. The new complex is designed for Boys & Girls Club of Collier County daily activities and for weekend or special community activities. It will also serve youth in the foster care system, children with special needs and young people at the county's emergency shelter.

"NCEF is pleased to support the sports and developmental programs taking place on Baker Field," says John Jordan, an NCEF trustee. "These programs shape young lives and contribute to the well being of the whole child. They even the playing field for youth who have had a tough start in life."

The development of Baker Field is part of the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation's "Swing for the Future" campaign, which was developed to provide at-risk youth in select neighborhoods safe places to play and learn. The goal of the campaign

is to develop multipurpose, low-maintenance fields that will provide a cohesive recreational and educational experience for underserved young people across the United States. In addition to Baker Field, parks are operating in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Texas. AstroTurf has provided synthetic turf for all of the projects.

The Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation uses baseball- and softball-themed programs to help build character and teach critical life lessons to at-risk youth in America's most distressed communities. Founded in 2001 by members of the Ripken family in memory of their patriarch Cal Ripken Sr., the foundation works to create programs that positively impact disadvantaged youth through active community partnerships with America's most successful youth service organizations.

For more information about the programs offered at the Boys & Girls Club of Collier County, including volunteer opportunities and other ways to help, visit www.bgccc.com. ■