

HERMITAGE

City opens new complex

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By Joe Pinchot, *Herald Staff Writer*



Tiffany Wolfe/Herald

A girls fast-pitch softball game is contested on one of the new fields.

Government sometimes works slowly but, in the case of Hermitage's athletic fields complex, it appears officials got it right in the end. When athletic organizations said they needed new fields because there weren't enough in town and some teams were playing on unimproved green spaces, city officials heard them.

Planning began in 2003 to build an athletic complex, and commissioners set aside money in a 2005 bond issue for the project. The city bought 53 acres adjacent to the Hermitage Little League complex and hired Environmental Planning & Design, Pittsburgh, to design the complex. It took two years to build and opened this year on South Darby Road, a \$2.2 million investment

"They're awesome," said fast-pitch softball coach Joe White. "I'm proud to have these fields." Teams starts using the fields in March, but commissioners dedicated the complex Wednesday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and refreshments. "This is really nice," said Debbie Clark, a softball mom. "It's great for the kids, for the girls. Maybe, more girls will come out" to play competitive sports.

The first phase of construction built the driveway, parking lot, restrooms, concession stand, two ball fields and a multi-purpose field that has been used for football and soccer, and installed utilities. The project also extended water and sewer lines to the Little League property.

City Recreation Director Ed Chess said the complex paid immediate dividends for girls softball. Three softball leagues consolidated into the Hermitage Girls Softball Association, encompassing seven fast-pitch teams and four slow-pitch teams, providing teams for girls ages 8 to 18.

The association runs the concession stand "It helped in sense that the 18 and under slow-pitch girls have had to play all of their games away," Chess said. Now, those girls have a home field. Other teams were using the Hickory High School field - the only previous fast pitch field available - or the green space behind Hermitage Middle School, which does not have dugouts, he said.

White, who coaches a 10 and under team, said he appreciates having a consistent field for the girls to play on. "You had to fight the mounds for Little League and sometimes grass fields as opposed to dirt fields," said White, whose team played last year on Little League fields and the high school field. Hermitage Little League has used the city fields for practice, the city was able to host an eight-team baseball tournament for kids ages 8 and under, said Chess, who schedules the fields.



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Returning from a trip to the new concession stand are Sydney Miller, 14, (left) and Kaylee Walker, 13, both of Greenville.

Shenango Area Youth Soccer Association and Hermitage Youth Football have used the multi-purpose field, Chess said. The response to the complex has been universally positive, officials said. "People who have been coming in from all over have been raving about the place, how nice it is," Chess said.



The city is awaiting the delivery of score boards and trash and recycling containers. Officials plan to build more fields, a trail, playgrounds, picnic shelters and other amenities as funding become available.

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Hayden Landfair, 6, of Hermitage makes contact with a pitch while playing on one of the new fields.