

**Pike Soccer Club strikes deal with city for fields,
As published in Indianapolis Star, March 15, 1999**

Youth organization will develop 90-acre site near Eagle Creek Park for use in June 2001.

HOWARD M. SMULEVITZ; STAFF WRITER

The fast-growing Pike Youth Soccer Club has received a 20th birthday present from the Indianapolis Department of Parks and Recreation - a 90-acre home, south of Eagle Creek Park and adjacent to the Indianapolis Colts training complex.

The club will develop the site that now is farmland and garden plots sponsored by the mayor's office. The gardens will remain.

Financing and construction of 18 to 20 game fields, several small practice fields and various buildings will take until mid-2001.

Mike Batic, president of the Pike Club, said the agreement comes as the league's registration for 125 travel and recreation teams is reaching 1,400, a 400 percent increase over seven years. "We're not only getting new members, we're keeping kids longer," Batic said.

Although the name represents locations and participants predominantly from Pike Township, there are no membership boundaries. Male and female players, mainly elementary and middle schoolers, come from as far south as Perry Township to northern suburbs such as Carmel, Brownsburg and Zionsville.

The club is leasing the land for 20 years, at \$1 a year, payable right away. The major cost will be an estimated \$1.2 million for basic construction of fields, drainage and irrigation systems and parking areas.

Additional costs will be for construction of restrooms, storage buildings and concession stands, and equipment purchases, from goals to lawn mowers. The club is obligated to maintain the grounds and facilities.

"It's a great situation for us," said Chuck Beard, manager of Eagle Creek Park. He said Eagle Creek Park will get good neighbors, parks department land will be used appropriately, and the city's cost is limited to supplying and emptying trash containers.

Beard said the site was zoned for soccer fields in 1997, and the pact with the club protects residential areas to the west, south and east by prohibiting field lights and loudspeakers.

The club has initiated its fund-raising plans but couldn't fully pursue them until the lease was signed, Batic said. The Indy Parks and Recreation Board authorized the transaction Thursday.

"We have grant applications in the process and are working on major in-kind donations from organizations," Batic said. He said the club also will seek corporate sponsors to help pay for facilities.

"If it all comes together, we'd like to start construction in late spring or early summer (this year) with earth-moving, getting the fields leveled and grass grown," Batic said.

The target is a grand opening by June 2001. Meeting that schedule is important, Batic said, because Indianapolis will be the host of the World Police and Fire Games in 2001, and the fields are tentatively designated for soccer and rugby.

Until the central site is completed, the group will continue to spread its games among Northwestway Park, its primary home since 1989; YWCA fields on Guion Road; and three fields that are part of the new home. However, the latter will be lost to use for a time during the construction.

"As a volunteer youth organization, we do what we can afford to," Batic observed.