

Every summer around 300 to 400 boys and girls, ages 4-12, participate in Evansville's recreational baseball program. It is an inclusive, no-cuts program. The program gives the kids an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of baseball as well as teamwork, sportsmanship, and fair play.

A couple years ago, we began a Business Sponsorship/Advertising Program. The idea originally came from one business, another business then researched how other youth baseball programs use business sponsors, and the idea got a favorable response when brought to the Park Board and to the board of the Chamber of Commerce.

In the first year, I was a bit anxious about approaching businesses with the sponsorship idea. I know that every time any group is fundraising, they hit up the businesses for donations. Our business community is great at supporting local groups and activities. But I didn't want to add another donation to the list; I wanted this to be seen as a reasonably priced advertising opportunity.

We gratefully have enough business sponsors each year. I'm not sure how many actually viewed it as an advertising opportunity or how many simply saw it as another act of good will and community support. But it was well received and I heard compliments and appreciation from players, parents, coaches, and the businesses.

Year round Evansville's business community gives tens of thousands of dollars to support local groups and activities. And they employ local residents. And the whole "Buy Local" idea does benefit our area economy.

A different slant on the "Buy Local" theme is that local business sponsorships bring an element of community spirit to the baseball program. One business owner, who had grown up in another town, recalled the businesses that sponsored teams he had played on decades before – pretty cool. Brewers or Snappers might be kind of local, but they're not Evansville. And using the names of other professional teams from North Carolina, Connecticut, or Missouri certainly aren't local. Team names such as Union Bank & Trust or Allen Custom Flatwork – now those are Evansville teams.

Under the program, we have two types of sponsors. First, for \$1250 we will have one sponsor for the entire T-Ball League (ages 4-5). Second, for \$125 each we will have sponsors for each individual team for the older kids (ages 6-12).

And we accommodate requests to have kids or grandkids placed on teams sponsored by family businesses. Depending on player registrations, we need around 18-20 business sponsors. They will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. But we will keep a waiting list in case player registrations need more teams.

The sponsored teams will have the appropriate business name and/or logo printed on the team t-shirts. Since the printing is a white transfer, we can't use color or multicolor logos. If a business doesn't have an actual logo to use, we can simply print their name in block or script letters. For the older age groups, the business name is also embroidered on the team caps.

The last three years, the baseball program has been self-sufficient, relying solely on player registrations to cover all direct expenses. Due to the sponsorship program, we reduced registration fees. All the proceeds from our business sponsors are used to reduce registration fees and purchase equipment.

Our deadline for accepting business sponsors is March 15. That's not much time, but early responses help us plan and prepare for the player registrations. We plan to start player registrations in mid March.

More info and sign-up forms for business sponsors are on the city website at www.ci.evansville.wi.gov.