

O.C. Jones & Sons hits a home run with ballpark renovation

BY DAVID MILLS

When children played ball in the Eastridge Little League this summer, they did not have to dodge gopher holes on the infield. Their cleats did not get stuck in some inexplicable soft mud in the outfield. And they didn't have to sit in unpainted, dilapidated dugouts.

That's because in the spring O.C. Jones & Sons completely renovated the old ball field, giving the East San Jose community a shining jewel in their neighborhood.

The refurbishing was valued at an estimated \$150,000, all of which the Berkeley-based construction firm donated in time, equipment and supplies.

"The kids love it. It's so much nicer," said Frank Navarro, the secretary for Eastridge Little League. "It really makes them feel like somebody cares."

This summer, 240 youngsters ages 4 to 18 from primarily working-class Hispanic-American families used the field. The teams ranged from T-Ball to the Majors.

long history of volunteer efforts, the Eastridge Little League field being the latest.

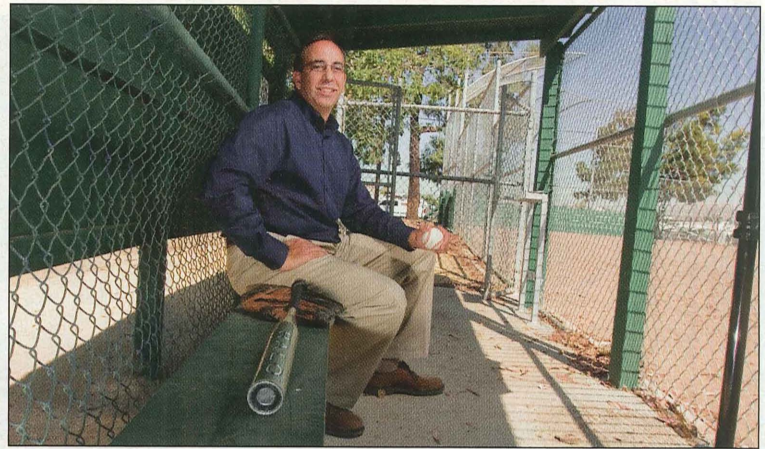
"Sponsoring the TLC for Kids Ballparks has been a way for all of us at O.C. Jones to give back," Kolander said.

Pete Benson, the company's area manager who oversaw the field renovation, said the employees and volunteers were eager to do the work.

"Everyone recognized the positive effect this would have on the local kids in the area," he said.

The members of Eastridge Little League can't say enough about O.C. Jones and their field of dreams.

"We think so much of them for all they have given us," Navarro said.



CROWD PLEASER: Kelly Kolander, O.C. Jones CEO, said the company was happy to donate the field to Eastridge. The refurbishing was valued at \$150,000.

VICKI THOMPSON

Community Impact Finalist

O.C. Jones & Sons
Inc.
TLC for Kids Ballpark

The field was particularly special for the girls' softball team. In the past, they had to travel long distances to find a field. This season, they were able to stay close to home. Next year, the league expects to field three or four softball squads.

"We're happy to be able to donate this field to Eastridge," said Kelly Kolander, CEO for O.C. Jones & Sons. "We know there will be many, many years of great games and great times for the kids."

This field of dreams began in October 2009 when KNBR radio and O.C. Jones collaborated to sponsor the TLC for Kids Ballparks Program, a contest to select a children's ballfield to be renovated.

In January, Eastridge Little League was selected. In March, O.C. Jones sent crews and supplies to East San Jose.

During that month, O.C. Jones employees as well as volunteer subcontractors reconstructed the entire field, including trucking in new sod. They repaired the back-stop and dugouts as well as put in pathways, irrigation lines and fences.

The field was ready for Opening Day on April 10, a ceremony that drew 300 people, including San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and softball player Vicky Galindo, silver medalist at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

"This is where dreams start," Galindo told the young ballplayers. "It's on this field where you're able to set goals and learn skills."

Navarro played on this field when he was young. He said the old field was filled with gopher holes, and a leaking water pipe kept turning the outfield into mush. The new field, he said, is safe for the children and allows them to play games in their neighborhood.

O.C. Jones specializes in civic projects. This past year, they have worked on improvements at California State University, East Bay, the Happy Hollow Park and Zoo in San Jose and the De Anza Mediated Learning Center, among others.

The 85-year-old company also has a

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