

Some Little Leagues at Risk Without Community Support

Little League was the first organized youth sports program in the world. It was founded on the belief that youth baseball and softball have the power to teach life lessons that build stronger communities and individuals. Carl E. Stotz, a resident of Williamsport, Penn., began the organization in spring 1939, when 30 eager players came together to form three baseball teams led by a collection of volunteers from his neighborhood. Today, Little League is composed of 6,500 leagues in more than 80 countries and throughout the United States.

Albuquerque has 15 leagues dotting the city. They facilitate camaraderie, boost self-esteem, teach responsibility, and promote diversity and equality among softball and baseball players ages 4 to 16.

As Little League has expanded worldwide, the notion of community has remained at its core. That tenet is one of the many reasons I am a proud board member of Alameda Little League, having played for this league myself many moons ago and now watching my own grandchild participate.

Little League programs are nonprofits that still organize independently within communities just as the inaugural division did in Pennsylvania 84 years ago. As part of a league's annual charter, it establishes its own geographic boundaries to operate, providing all children who reside or attend school within those boundaries the opportunity to participate within the league and have a meaningful experience. We are distinct, yet united by the motto, "One Team. One Little League."

However, anyone examining area leagues would be hard-pressed to see truth in that slogan. Some of us are really struggling, including Alameda Little League, while others are not due to a variety of inequities often beyond our control. These include geographic boundaries. Alameda, for example, is within a section of town that is largely industrial, with fewer homes, many low-income. This translates into fewer players, fewer donors, fewer parents who can volunteer, and an operation spread thin.

Further, Alameda Little League and many others lease fields from the City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation. We use a park and clubhouse at 8536



Alameda Little League Field

Alameda Park Drive NE. Leagues contracted with the City are responsible for maintaining and servicing the facilities and paying for equipment, whereas leagues playing in fields provided by Bernalillo County do not bear that high financial burden; the County takes care of it.

Alameda operates on an annual budget of about \$20,000, with our only sources of income being registration fees, donations, and funding, as available, from the City and State. While we do have control over registration fee amounts, we are sensitive about how much to charge as many of our players come from lower

income families. We also use part of our budget for scholarships.

Alameda's needs are basic: bleachers, shade structures, playable fields, security lighting, and amenities such as a play area, plaza, concessions, and bathrooms. We fall grossly short when it comes to these and other assets like turf fields, scoreboards, and paved parking.

Based upon an analysis conducted by MRWM landscape architects in 2021, the cost to bring the area up to par would cost about \$6 million. We have been fortunate this year to receive

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