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HENNING BASEBALL FIELD: IF YOU IMPROVE IT, THEY WILL COME

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by Heather Rule

Henning's ballfield was a nice spot, back in the day. Dan Broten, director of the Henning Landmark Center, recalls going to Henning Giants games in the summers. He remembers cars of baseball fans lined up around the first-

and third-base lines, with people listening the game on their car radios. If a batter hit a home run, fans in their cars cheered in a unique way. "Everybody would flash their headlights and honk their horns and stuff," Broten said. "It was just kind of a nice little local flavor to that field, I thought."



But as decades passed, the field deteriorated without any major improvements and "was in pretty rough shape," said Randy Misegades, activities director at Henning Public School.

Dugout bricks caved in, the pitcher's mound was in shambles, weeds won out over grass and the ballpark lights weren't functional. But in spring 2019 the community decided it was time to bring some life back to this old, favorite spot. Work began that spring and finished in 2020.

The new-and-improved ballfield includes new ground-level dugouts, a press box, sound system, electronic scoreboard, batting cage, irrigation system, a rebuilt pitcher's mound and home plate area, new infield sod and new stadium lights. The added press box provides a spot for a radio broadcaster and public address announcer. An electronic scoreboard, donated by First National Bank, replaced the old, manual scoreboard – "you had to physically go out there and hang the numbers on it," Misegades said. Now, it's operated from the press box.

The field improvements were a collaborative effort, both in funding and volunteer hours, between the City of Henning, Henning Public School and Otter Tail Central Baseball program, along with business and private donations. If there was a silver lining with the COVID-19 pandemic, it was that it bought them more time in the spring to finish the projects before the first games in the summer.

Though the pandemic limited things, Henning hosted a district, four-team baseball tournament, along with some other games. They received a lot of compliments on the atmosphere and the field, Misegades said. The field lights were a big draw. "If you have a summer night and people see the lights on... people gravitate toward it," Misegades said. "The way it's set up, people can really just drive right in there and walk up and see what's going on."

These types of improvements can lead to hosting bigger tournaments, more varsity games and events, but also enticing more kids to participate in baseball, Misegades said.

The field also received a name last summer: Tony Kawlewski Field. It is in honor of Kawlewski, a longtime baseball supporter who ran the amateur team and also took care of the field for years. Kawlewski and his family were on the field for the dedication on July 31, 2020.

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