

# Ironworkers Local 75 promotes community: Rounds up support to help make baseball dreams come true



*Tristan Pastrano practices hitting balls at the Miracle League of Arizona ballpark in North Scottsdale on Feb. 9, 2013.*

A little group in North Scottsdale that makes miracles happen for disabled children has won over the hearts of Arizona ironworkers.

That miracle is providing some joy through playing baseball.

To date the Ironworkers Local 75 has donated more than \$70,000 to the Miracle League of Arizona and helped with getting other building trades unions and contractors donate thousands more. The nonprofit group organizes baseball games for children with physical ailments, as well as special needs from autism, Downs syndrome, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and other diagnosis that make physical activity difficult.

“You can give money to anybody,” said Martin “Buzz” Murphy, Business Manager & Financial Secretary/Treasurer of Ironworkers Local 75. “This group is special.”

Murphy lights up talking about the kids participating in the games and quotes the league’s catch phrase, “Every child deserves a chance to play baseball.”

That’s what they get: A chance to hit balls and run bases on rubberized turf that’s more accessible for children with disabilities. Young athletes are placed on teams based upon their age and skill level. If there are physical limitations, players are paired up with a buddy volunteer to help. The games focus on building success and encouragement. An additional benefit is creating friendships.

“Many are lonely. They make a lot of friends when they are out there on the field,” said Dan Haren Sr., executive director of the Miracle League of Arizona. The league currently serves about 200 children and young adults.

About five years ago, Haren went to the Diamondbacks because his son was a pitcher on the team and asked if the team would support building a field for special-needs children.

“Since my son is a professional major league baseball player, we both felt blessed and wanted to provide children and families with special needs an opportunity to enjoy the great game of baseball,” Haren said.

He showed a film of what the Miracle League had done in Georgia and soon had a \$400,000 donation to get things rolling. Now instead of a field, his dream was to build a stadium that would support the special needs of the children and families who would be participating.

With the help of many community supporters, including unions recruited to help by Murphy, the dream became a reality in 2011. The \$1.8 million Miracle League stadium in Scottsdale opened for play at the former Cheyenne Elementary School grounds. The current winter season runs through March 2. The spring season begins March 26 and runs through May 11.

## Get to a Game

The Miracle League of Arizona Stadium is at 11130 E. Cholla St., Scottsdale. The 2013 winter season runs through March 2. The 2013 spring season runs March 26 to May 11. Check out a game:

### Tuesdays

- 5:45 p.m. Junior League, ages 4-7.
- 7 p.m. Combined Intermediate and Major leagues, ages 8 and up.

### Wednesdays

- 5:30 p.m. Advanced League, all ages.

### Saturdays

- 10 a.m. Junior League, ages 4-7.
- 11:15 a.m. Combined Intermediate and Major leagues, ages 8 and up.
- 12:30 p.m. Advanced League, all ages.

Learn how your child can participate: [www.mlaz.org](http://www.mlaz.org)



Support continues as a \$400,000 adaptive playground opened behind left field on Feb. 2, 2013. Here you'll find a rubberized surface surrounding a play structure that accommodates children with special needs.

The stadium and play area are a gift to families such as the Pastranos of Gilbert, who have been participating in the adaptive baseball games for two seasons. Their 4-year-old son, Tristan is diagnosed with autism and cerebral palsy.

At first he was a bit shy and needed two helpers to get him around the bases. Now he looks forward to Saturdays.

"Tristan likes it. He's come a long way. He knows how to round bases and hit the ball (from a tee) himself," said Jerry Pastrano, smiling with pride.

Mom Pat Pastrano is grateful that Tristan has the opportunity to play a sport with other children like him. And she and her husband get a bit of normalcy in between all the doctor's visits and therapy.

"You get to be a parent and cheer in the stands and worry about normal things, like is his uniform washed," she said.



Families don't have to pay for their children to participate. The league is supported completely by community donations, grants and fundraisers, said Haren.

Ironworkers Local 75 got involved after Haren and Murphy met. The two Irishmen began chatting about the project.

"We still needed shade...and a sound system. It wasn't a complete stadium. Then I got a phone call from Buzz and he had a check for \$40,000 from the Ironworkers 75," Haren recalled. "I was even more blown away when he said, 'I'm going to keep working for you.'"

Murphy's enthusiasm for the Miracle League spread, leading to other building trades donations that would help build the playground. Among the donations was \$1,000 from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 640 and \$5,000 from Arizona Steel Field Erectors Association.

Murphy was touched by the organization and couldn't help but support the group.

"This is huge for families," he said. "There's so many things we take for granted." Among those things are the ability to make friends and play sports.

"It's heart breaking to see kids born this way," Murphy said.

Then they get on a field where many obstacles are eliminated. Murphy It's pure joy seeing families get to cheer on their kids and watching the players laugh and smile.

The Miracle League first formed in Georgia, when youth coach Eddie Bagwell invited a wheelchair bound child to join a game in 1997. The next year, more kids with disabilities were asked to play. Soon the Rotary Miracle League Fund formed to raise money to create a special field for kids and help grow more Miracle Leagues across the country. The first Miracle League field broke ground on Dec. 31, 1999.

Today more than 250 leagues exist in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Canada and Australia, serving more than 200,000 children and young adults with disabilities.