Playing the field: Little Leagues adapt to changing times

Organizations grow more sophisticated

BY PAUL LIGON
STAFF WRITER

Over the next two weekends, thousands of youngsters on the North Shore will flood their hometown streets for the annual Little League parades. The parades provide a quaint and timeless image of boys and girls in caps and uniforms marching down Main Street. But for the adults who run Little League, the times are not so simple.

Many Little League organizations have become increasingly sophisticated, with Web sites that offer online registration, and even sell their own line of clothing. "We've done everything to modernize our organization and bring ourselves into the 21st century," Beverly Little League President Thomas See please LEAGUES, Page A2

A big score: Hamilton couple build diamond for the town

BY ANNA SCOTT
STAFF WRITER

HAMILTON — Some people donate team T-shirts. Others sell candy bars. John and Linda Donovan of Hamilton did something extraordinary to support their local Little League — they built the players a baseball diamond with its very own pitcher's mound.

For their good deed, John Donovan, a professor at MIT who has authored several books and owns land throughout Hamilton, Manchester and Essex, will ride in the front of this morning's Little League parade and throw out the first pitch at Cheeseman Field. "What they've done here is so amazing and amazing," said Maggie Whitcomb, the town's recreation director. "People don't do this. I mean who does it?" The Donovans cleared several acres of forest land they own on Sagamore Road, sodded it, and dug a well to install an irrigation system. In addition to building a baseball diamond — the exact specifications mentioned in the Little League rule book — they also constructed a soccer field and a lacrosse field.

After two years of work on the field, the Hamilton-Wenham youth sports teams will start playing there this season.

FIELD: Couple helping out Little League

The gift in particular is meaningful to the Little League's 90 baseball teams, which serve 800 boys and girls between the ages of 4 and 12.
The nine fields across Hamilton and Wenham haven't been enough to accommodate all the players, said Rich McGrath, president of Hamilton-Wenham Little League. Often two teams have to share one practice field, he said.

"This is like a dream come true," McGrath said. "The first time I walked on it, I really wasn't ecstatic. It's just beautiful, and in perfect condition."

McGrath said he plans to use the private fields, which are nestled among a grove of trees, just for games, not for practices. "I think this is going to be special to our teams," he said.

The Donovans could not reach their daughter, but Whitcomb said the idea for the project came about two years ago, when John Donovan asked if he could use one of the town's fields for a softball game. When Whitcomb told him there wasn't space during the sports season, he suggested he could build a field for the town.

"In my 30 years as a recreational professional, no one has ever done anything this phenomenal out of the goodness of his heart," she said.

For anyone wondering how to refer to the new playing area, Whitcomb said she left that decision up to the man with the big idea.

"The Professor-Donovan Fields," Whitcomb said. "That's what he wants them called."