

Roeder '100% confident' on Prospect Meadows

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jack Roeder was the general manager of the Cedar Rapids Kernels when they opened the new Veterans Memorial Stadium in 2002, so he knows a few things about building a ballpark and making sure things are done the right way.

Now he's overseeing another grand project - this time with 17 ballfields - and he's absolutely convinced the Prospect Meadows Baseball & Softball Complex will be seen to fruition in the next few years.

The \$9.4 million complex is scheduled to be built on 121 acres of farm land just northeast of Marion near the juncture of Highway 13 and County Home Road. The site is east of Highway 13 and just south of County Home Road.

"I'm 100 percent confident, or as confident as can be at this point, that this project is going to move forward and it will get built," Roeder said Monday.

"With the amount of money we've raised at this point, there's no turning back. The project will move forward."

Roeder joined Prospect Meadows in the fall of 2010 and there was speculation about opening the complex as early as 2014, but it's an immense project that involves heavy fundraising, meticulous planning and working with a variety of government agencies at the local and state level.

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At this point, Roeder thinks it's most likely the new complex will open in 2016.

"Realistically, I think if we were open in the spring of 2016 we would be doing well," he said. "I wouldn't write 2015 off at this point, but realistically I'd be very happy if the facility - at least in part - opened in 2016."

Roeder said it might be necessary to open only part of the facility - perhaps eight or nine fields - in 2016 and add the rest later, but said there's a "real strong possibility" the entire facility would open in 2016.

"It's probably taken longer than I would have liked, and I'm sure others on our board would have liked," he said. "But at the same time, I do think we're crossing all our T's and dotting our I's and trying to do this the right way and do it correctly and make sure, every step of the way, that we're moving forward."

"I'm not disappointed that it's going to be 2015 or 2016," he said. "Actually, I think it's working out for the best the way it's going. It's a major project. It's a lot of money to raise. There are a lot of moving parts, and there are a lot of volunteers involved with this."

The board has not set a date to begin construction.

Roeder said the Prospect Meadows board of directors hopes to raise \$4.2 million in private donations and \$5.2 million from public funds. He said the board has received approximately \$2.1 million in pledges from private sources and \$750,000 in pledged public funds from the City of Marion.

The board is hopeful of receiving a Community Attraction & Tourism grant and a state transportation grant, among other public funds. The board will be leasing the land from Linn County for \$1 per year for 20 years, with three 25-year options.

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Eight of the fields at Prospect Meadows would have 400-foot fences that would be suitable for high school and college baseball games. Eight fields would have 300-foot fences for softball and youth baseball games. There also would be a "Miracle Field" for people with disabilities.

The facility also would have a recreational lake, walking trails, a playground area and a two-acre flower garden. The facility also would have concession stands, bleachers, restrooms, a storm shelter and parking for 1,200 vehicles.

According to a feasibility study, Prospect Meadows would generate \$25 million annually in direct spending in the area. The board anticipates 60,000 out-of-state visitors each year for tournaments and 120,000 total visitors annually, resulting in 80,000 hotel room nights.

The board anticipates \$3 million in annual income at the facility and \$2.7 million in expenses, with 200 full-time and part-time jobs with an annual payroll of more than \$500,000. Prospect Meadows is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Perfect Game USA, a baseball scouting company with headquarters in Cedar Rapids, would be a major tenant at Prospect Meadows, staging tournaments and showcases, according to Roeder. The facility also would be used for youth leagues and tournaments, as well as adult leagues and tournaments.

Roeder said the board is committed to building a first-class facility for the community to enjoy for many years to come.

"When you really look at the big picture, 20 years from now it really won't matter whether it opened in 2014, 2015, 2016 or 2017," he said. "It's a great project and it will bring a lot to the community in so many different ways."