

Roeder shows the way at Prospect Meadows

Written by Jim Ecker
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Jack Roeder arrived at Prospect Meadows bright and early Thursday morning to turn on the field lights and get ready for a television interview for KGAN and FOX28.

The moon was visible over one shoulder and the eastern sky was starting to brighten slightly over the other with dawn approaching. He had time to think and reflect about Opening Day at the new facility, a project that has consumed nearly 10 years of his life.

It's been a long journey to a happy ending at Prospect Meadows. Or rather, a happy new beginning. The sparkling new facility is now officially open for business.

"You know, between this and my two grandsons being born, I don't think I've had a prouder moment," he later told assembled guests at the ribbon cutting ceremony Thursday afternoon.



Roeder began working on Prospect Meadows shortly after he retired as general manager of the Cedar Rapids Kernels in 2010. He accepted another challenging job as GM for the proposed new baseball and softball complex and has been working at it ever since.

Out of respect and appreciation, the Prospect Meadows board of directors surprised Roeder Thursday by naming the pathway to the eight regulation diamonds as "Jack Roeder Way."

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They even gave him a green street sign to make it official.

Roeder has certainly shown the way.

"Jack, you are my hero today," said State Senator Liz Mathis, who helped Prospect Meadows secure state funding. "You had a vision, you were persistent and you made it happen."

Roeder, of course, jokes that the facility probably would have opened sooner if somebody else had been in charge. He profusely praised the multitude of people who worked tirelessly on the project and heaped special praise on board chairman Tim Strellner, calling Strellner the MVP of the project.

"We are where we're at today because of Tim," he said.

There was plenty of praise to go around. And plenty of thank-you's during the ribbon cutting ceremony under clear blue skies.

Four regulation baseball fields were christened Thursday at the park, which is located just north of Marion. Four more fields should be ready in mid-June. Eight more fields are planned by 2023, and there's also a Miracle Field for people with special needs that began touching hearts Thursday with kids playing on the turf.

"We really want to keep going," said Strellner. "We want to be known as the best facility in the Midwest. We're off to a good start."

It was announced Thursday that one of the eight fields will be known as Bill Quinby Field, in honor of the Cedar Rapids man who has devoted much of his life to helping others and boosting the community. There's also a Bill Quinby baseball field at Daniels Park in Cedar Rapids, giving him two fields in his honor.

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Prospect Meadows also unveiled the Rotary Donor Wall, an iconic part of the facility that greets visitors and catches their eye as soon as they walk onto the grounds. It's shaped like a big map of Iowa and resembles an American flag with red, white and blue stars and stripes.

Families and businesses can get their names inscribed on the structure and help raise money for future projects at Prospect Meadows.