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## 'This is what I'm building'

### Developers officially unveil Magic Sports plans

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The \$350 million Magic Sports complex proposal announced Thursday is modeled after the successful Cooperstown Dreams Park in upstate New York.

The developer behind the South Vineland project, Ron Nametko of Ocean County, said Magic Sports would bring jobs to the area, create millions of dollars in ratables and provide a quality facility for traveling sports teams.

"This is what it is going to be. This is reality. This is what I am building," said Nametko, founder of Magic Sports Complex of New Jersey, before 100 people gathered for a news conference in the City Hall council chambers.

"I can't solve unemployment, but I can bring thousands of jobs to the community," he said.

In 1999, Nametko founded Manchester Magic Baseball in Manchester Township and began traveling with teams to competitions. Nametko, his wife and sons quickly learned the complexity of traveling sports programs. They said they spent a lot of time looking for lodging, places to eat and activities to keep 15 boys, five coaches, family and fans busy during down time.

One of the most successful operations Nametko found was the weeklong baseball tournaments for boys 12 and younger held for 11 weeks each summer at Cooperstown.

He studied the Cooperstown program for three years and spent five weeks at the Dreams Park with his team.

Dreams Park hosted 880 teams in 2004 and gross sales for the 11-week tournament season were expected to exceed \$15 million in 2004, according to Magic Sports' website. The next year, sales were expected to bring in \$17 million, according to the website.

Nametko said he saw the potential in building on the Cooperstown idea. However, his idea would include more age groups and more sports.

Plans displayed at the news conference showed designs for 12 baseball fields, eight softball fields, four soccer/lacrosse fields, seven tennis courts and volleyball courts.

"Someday you will be able to stand on top of the complex and see 24 games being played," Nametko said.

A separate facility, called the Magic Village, would be a home for visiting athletes. A monolithic dome would facilitate the Magic Arena with indoor track and sports fields, a dozen basketball courts, a conference center, broadcasting facilities, medical services, restaurants and food court.

A land purchase is under agreement with South Jersey Industries' Energy and Minerals Inc. for 248.6 acres with 40 adjacent acres under agreement with local resident Jay Morie.

The developers did not divulge the cost of the land sale.

The news conference included Nametko; Bruce Farrell, the project's director of development; Greg Filipek, principal of SORA Northeast Development, who is the master developer; Mayor Robert Romano; and Sandy Forosisky, the city's director of economic development.

Nametko estimated the economic impact to the region would be \$250 million annually for the indoor and all-weather outdoor facilities.

On Monday, Magic Sports submitted its plans for the complex to the city zoning board for review.

"Its pretty hard to believe that they could get the commitment to finance this project in these hard economic times, so hats off to Magic Sports," Romano said.

Romano said he has been meeting with Nametko for two years to help bring the project to Vineland.

"We appreciate you picking Vineland," the mayor said. "It's a spectacular project and just the impact, the construction jobs, are going to be amazing for Cumberland County. We thank you and we will assist you any way we can."

The complex would be built in two phases, beginning next summer, Nametko said. Construction would continue into 2015, he said.

Filipek, of SORA Northeast Development, has experience that includes such large-scale projects as the Wharton Executive Training Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the public-private development of the \$300 million Rowan Boulevard project in Glassboro.

Magic Sports failed to establish a complex in the Mays Landing area several years ago. Hamilton Township officials voted down its proposal, citing noise and cost concerns.

Nametko said he has decided on Vineland because of its location.

Asked why Magic Sports believes it will succeed in Vineland when it failed in Hamilton Township, Farrell said: "We looked at what went wrong and made sure we wouldn't make the same mistakes."

Filipek said developers don't think they will encounter the same problems here.

"Ron approached us beginning this year and we tried to find what was wrong with that project," he said. "In the Vineland project, I feel we have addressed the location issue, and the adjacency to Route 55 hopefully will make a big difference."

Nametko said the complex would create "hundreds of direct and indirect permanent jobs" during each of the construction phases. It also would bring 200 to 400 temporary construction jobs. In total, more than 1,000 jobs could be created here, officials said.

The land for the project has a 500-foot frontage along South Lincoln Avenue, a 350-foot frontage along Sheridan Avenue and 1,827 feet along Route 55, according to plans submitted to the city. There also are 414 feet along Whitaker Avenue in Millville, according to the plans.

Nametko declined to disclose the names of the private investors backing the project.

The development group said it would not ask the city for any money or loans to fund the project.

"This is a private project," Farrell said.

Magic Sports would offer job training to Cumberland County residents. Nametko said he will build a

6,000-square-foot classroom to teach sports radio and television. Training would be conducted in actual radio and TV studios that would “rival Philadelphia.”

Magic Sports also would offer hotel management courses for college students at the proposed four-star hotel and indoor/outdoor water park.

Forosisky said her office and Magic Sports would present available employment opportunities to the county Office of Workforce Development and One-Stop Career Center so they could be matched with job seekers.

Nametko said the city’s location is “ideally situated” for Magic Sports because it has access to Route 55 from Lincoln Avenue at the northern end of the parcel and the southern end bordering Route 55 and Millville.

Forosisky said she was especially excited to introduce the developers “because underlying in this development is the creation of wealth.

“And how do you create wealth? You do it through job creation and ratables. And, when people from outside the community come into the community and spend, that is the epitome of economic development for the community. We think this will spur economic development around the project as well,” Forosisky said.

She said her office and Magic Sports would coordinate promotions so it includes other businesses in the city. For instance, visitors staying at Magic Sports would get information about other local and county businesses.

Nametko said he had traveled the nation and looked at different locations before settling on Vineland.

“I travel in steps and in miles, and someone brought me here. I didn’t do this myself. There is a higher power that controls everything, and I believe in that,” Nametko said.

“This has been my life. This project is not about me. Its about taking care of people and moms and dads who travel with children to play the games.”

Nametko said the project will not impact the environment.

“There is farmland all around. I’m not impacting anyone and I’m not tearing down any trees,” he said.

He said the Magic Village will be built so it can accommodate 72 men’s teams and 72 women’s teams.

Nametko thanked everyone who attended the news conference.

“I need your support. I appreciate those who are here. There are no closed doors. We are not hiding behind anything. I’m telling you that I promise that I’m building this complex for the children,” Nametko said.

Magic Sports would be the prototype for other similar complex throughout the nation, officials said.

“This is not just a for-profit venture. This is something that is going to help the neighborhood and the kids. We truly believe the economic impact will not just generate jobs, but long-term jobs,” Filipek said.

He said Magic Sports planned training facilities and was “talking with a couple different hospitals, setting up different scenarios, including an acute care center.”

“It is really exciting that there are so many different components,” he said.

“This is privately financed and we are currently working on that. We are moving along successfully and moving forward. Obviously, we have to be able to secure money as we move it through approval phases and balance of construction, Filipek said.

Nametko estimated the 500-suite hotel and water park will create 600 to 700 jobs and another 150 to 200 jobs will be created in the arena.

He said Magic Sports will be a fenced-in facility and handle its own 24-hour Magic Village security, creating another 300 jobs.

Filipek said the first hurdle for Magic Sports will be to get needed permits.

"We have a marketing staff in place, so all we have to do is get approvals out of the way," he said.

City Council President Peter Coccaro, who attended the news conference, said "I am encouraged by what I see here.

"I know our recreation department is always searching for fields for kids to play on, and I think this will alleviate some of the problems," Coccaro said.

Coccaro asked whether expansion had been planned after phase 2.

"Yes, there is phase 3," said Filipek." "There's always a phase 3."

## Additional Facts

### WHAT MAGIC SPORTS PLANS TO OFFER

**Baseball** — Offering the best possible baseball competition during 13 weeks of summer as well as year-round training and competition.

**Women's sports training and tournaments/leagues/camps** — Special focus on the competitive needs of female athletes in multiple sports.

**Special populations and disabled athletes** — Development of services and competitions addressing the needs of special athletes, including accessibility.

**Training and tournaments/leagues/camps** — Opportunities for athletes of all ages and abilities to complete and train in all types of sports-related endeavors.

**Sports career training** — 6,000 square feet of classroom space for programming that allows individuals to explore and prepare for careers in the sports industry.

Source: Magic Sports of NJ

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