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TOP STORY

Construction starts on youth sports complex

By JACE DICOLA Jace.DiCola@gjsentinel.com

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Tuesday marked the beginning of a community effort to transform an empty 10-acre lot into a sports complex that will fulfill a longstanding lack of space for local youth tournaments and clubs.

“My wife and I moved here in the year 2001, and I quickly realized that this area really lacked opportunities for youth to do sports,” said Dean Havlik, the founder and president of Grand Junction Blackout. “I really wanted to give our youth some more opportunities.”



Photos by Larry Robinson/The Daily Sentinel


Dirt is thrown around to mark the official groundbreaking of GJ Blackout's 10-acre sports complex during a groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday. The new facility is slated to open one year from groundbreaking and will house four basketball courts, six volleyball courts and 12 pickleball courts, as well as a concession stand for snacks for spectators between games.

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The hope is the Blackout Sports Fieldhouse, near Community Hospital on 23½ Road and G Road, will improve the ability to host tournaments and league play for basketball and volleyball teams, as well as offer a venue for pickleball.



GJ Blackout fieldhouse approved by city

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Havlik, who is also the Mesa County Coroner, estimated construction will take about one year, so he hopes the complex will open by next spring. He officially began planning and fundraising for this complex nearly three years ago, but he has been an influence in local youth basketball since founding the youth basketball club, GJ Blackout, more than a decade ago.



Grand Junction High School senior basketball player Nerea Sills, right, speaks alongside Fruita Monument senior basketball player Addi Eyre about the importance of GJ Blackout and how they grew as players and as people in the youth basketball league during a groundbreaking ceremony for GJ Blackout's 10-acre sports complex on Tuesday.

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Havlik established the team when his daughters were in middle school to provide a structured basketball club team. Havlik has continued the program after his daughters grew up because he realized there were no other hoops club teams offered in the area.

Blackout is now a major youth basketball program in the region that has greatly influenced several participants. Two of those former players are Grand Junction High School senior Nerea Sills and Fruita Monument High School senior Addi Eyre, who both attended the groundbreaking to speak to the importance of the new facility.



Supporters of GJ Blackout and members of the public listen as GJ Blackout founder and President Dean Havlik thanks the community during a groundbreaking ceremony for the 10-acre GJ Blackout Fieldhouse in Grand Junction on Tuesday.

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“We are very grateful for everything that Dean has done for us and we’re excited that he’s expanding the Blackout community,” Sills said. “So many young athletes are a part of the program. With the addition of the facility, their love for competitive sports will only grow, and we believe that sports help to develop youth character by teaching them leadership skills, dedication and hard work.”

Eyre said playing on the Blackout team helped her and Sills find their love for basketball, and they have continued playing in high school after aging out of the program. Eyre added that her ability to compete at the high school level is because of her participation in the Blackout program from sixth to eighth grade.



Supporters of GJ Blackout and members of the public look at digital renderings of GJ Blackout's 10-acre sports complex during a groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday.

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Havlik said one of the primary advantages of the fieldhouse will be the ability to host tournaments and ease the amount of travel for youth athletes, and potentially increases the number of tournaments in which they compete.

Another advantage Havlik said is the more tournaments and games the kids participate in, the more opportunities they have to improve and become competitive with the rest of the state.



Vice President of GJ Blackout Kevin Young, right, smiles after breaking ground on GJ Blackout's 10-acre sports complex during a groundbreaking ceremony on March 26, 2024.

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"I've always told people I would love to see one of our high school basketball teams win a state championship. I don't care which high school it is, it would just be nice to see that someday," Havlik said. "I've lived here for 23 years, and I haven't seen a high school championship yet."

According to Grand Junction Parks and Recreation Director Ken Sherbenou, the new building also has the potential to financially benefit the City of Grand Junction. He expects that more tournaments will result in more families from other parts of Colorado — and beyond — traveling to Grand Junction.



GJ Blackout Founder and President Dean Havlik gives his thanks to the community and explains how important youth sports are to him, his family and the community at large during a groundbreaking ceremony for the 10-acre GJ Blackout field house in Grand Junction on March 26, 2024. The new facility will house four basketball courts, six volleyball courts and 12 pickle ball courts, as well a concession stand for snacks for spectators in between games.

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“When you have these large venues with multiple courts or multiple fields, you’re able to bring in a considerable amount of economic activity with those visitors coming in, staying at our hotels, eating at our restaurants and spending money at our retail shops,” Sherbenou said. “I think the GJ Blackout facility will generate a similar positive economic impact.”

By the start of construction Tuesday, \$3.45 million had been raised for the project through grant funding and community donations; Havlik said he was especially grateful to their construction company, North Peak, for the unconventional donation of lowered construction costs for the project, and Community Hospital for its \$100,000 donation.



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The current fieldhouse fund is still about \$2.5 million short of the nearly \$6 million goal, but Havlik said that there are several months left to continue raising money through donations and grants. He said the building's construction was planned so they could assess costs and make changes as needed.



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“Right now we’re planning on a full build, but if we can’t raise some money here and there, then we could maybe scale some things down,” Havlik said.



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Havlik said the community and grant funding that has been raised — and what will continue to be raised — has not only been critical in making the fieldhouse possible but also in making it accessible to the entire youth community.

“This is definitely to benefit the community, that’s pretty much what we’re all about, is trying to improve our community and gear it toward the youth,” Havlik said. “We do want to cover our costs, of course, but we’re not looking to make a profit. The reward is seeing the smiles on the kids’ faces. It’s really enjoyable to have them having a good time, success and fun.”

Blackout Sports Fieldhouse

Location: 715 23½ Road

Size: 39,353 square feet with adjustable space

Capacity: 4 basketball courts, 6 volleyball courts and 12 pickleball courts.

Amenities: Basketball, volleyball, pickleball, wrestling and soccer (primary use will be for basketball and volleyball).

Opening: Tentatively set to open in the spring of 2025.

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