



IN THE NEWS

July 1, 2005: The Daily News wrote an article in its "Great People" column about our organization and baseball

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Dynamos go to bat for kids

Spotlight

Clem Richardson

Clem Richardson writes the City Beat and Great People columns. Prior to joining the Daily News in 1993, he worked for New York Newsday, the Miami Herald, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Anderson Independent newspapers. The Duke University graduate is married and the father of two.

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DiDonna for NEWS

Eddie Albert (L), executive director, and Marc Lussier, director of travel, have big plans and hearts.

We like to talk about how baseball builds character and helps mold young men and women into productive members of society.

But baseball doesn't happen by itself.

It needs people like Marc Lussier and Eddie Albert of the 78th Precinct Youth Council, who have been very, very good for the game.

You can see the fruits of their years of labor in Brooklyn's Prospect Park in the spring and summer, on most weekday evenings and on any Saturday morning.

In the glen behind the bandshell off Prospect Park West (circled by West Drive inside the park) you'll find hundreds of children 5 to 15 years old running bases and fielding and hitting baseballs - hard at work learning and enjoying America's favorite pastime.

They are there courtesy of Lussier, Albert, and parents and supporters who have kept the council baseball teams running since 1989.

It's a monumental task, organizing more than 900 children, young adults and their families each season, something made even more impressive when you consider that, outside of one paid coordinator and fund-raiser, all of the workers, including Lussier and Albert, are volunteers.

"It's gigantic," said Albert, an attorney in his "mid-50s" and the group's executive director and commissioner of

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"It runs pretty smoothly once it's up and running," said graphic artist Lussier, 45, a former council executive director and now the group's director of travel baseball. "We just have to get it running."

"These guys are great," said City Councilman Bill de Blasio (D-Park Slope), who has co-coached teams for daughter Ciara, 10, and son Dante, 7, for several years. "It's really awesome - all these kids and all these fields and little money to work with - yet they keep it together. They're good with people and they set the right tone with the parents that some of the behavior you read about in the papers won't be tolerated."

Lussier's title - heck, even the league name - requires explanation.

The 78th Precinct Youth Council started in 1988 at St. Saviour's Church on Eighth Ave. in Park Slope. The name came not from an affiliation with the local police precinct, but as a description of the area where team members lived, Albert said.

The group eventually split off from the church and found new life as an organization supported by the parents.

The league has 58 intramural teams of 15 players each, grouped by age, which compete with each other, Albert said. New players are auditioned before being assigned to a team, so the league can maintain teams of equal strength, both men said.

"There aren't many blowouts," Lussier said. "We try to make sure the teams have equal talent."

Then there are the seven travel teams, each called Bulldogs, which play other clubs across the city and country that are in either the Babe Ruth (13 and over) or Cal Ripken (12 and under) leagues.

Though they play Little League-style baseball, you won't see any of the Bulldog teams in the Little League World Series because of a reality of New York life - they're not affiliated with Little League.

"We approached Little League a while back about joining them, but they wanted us to have a dedicated field," a baseball field used only for Little League games, Albert said. "This is New York City - where are you going to find that kind of space?"

"Maybe if we found someone to give us a half-million dollars, or a bunch of land somewhere - but where are you going to find that in the middle of Brooklyn?" Lussier said.

Working out of a tiny clubhouse on Tenth Ave., the field-less league still runs with sophistication rivaling high

school teams.

Each year, former players receive already completed applications by mail, Albert said. They need only check the information and drop the form in the mail to reenroll.

Albert declined to state the leagues annual budget but did say application fees account for about 70% of it, with the rest coming from donations, team sponsors and fund-raisers.

And no child, he said, is turned away simply because he or she - the league has several girls' softball teams, as well as girls who play on boys' teams - cannot afford the application fee.

Because the league draws its coaches from parent volunteers who may not have played the game in years - both Lussier, who has been with the league for 15 years, and Albert, who has been with it for six, came in as parent coaches - the two produced instructional DVDs that explain the fundamentals given to new coaches.

They also have the latest equipment, from helmets to pitching machines, to help players hone their skills.

Both men said that many of their players - including both Marc Jr. and Eddie Jr. - go on to play in high school and college.

And DeBlasio said council alum Adam Ottavino, who now pitches for Northeastern University, has been drafted by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

To find out more about the 78th Precinct Youth Council, check out its Web site: www.78youthsports.org.

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