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WEATHER



Weather art by:

Andrew Ouellette, age 9, Danvers YMCA.

Today: Mostly cloudy, chance of rain. Sunny in afternoon. Highs in lower 60s.

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Playing the field: Little Leagues adapt to changing times Organizations grow more sophisticated

By PAUL LEIGHTON
STAFF WRITER

Over the next two weekends, thousands of youngsters on the North Shore will flood their hometown streets for the annual Little League parades.

The parades provide a quaint and timeless image of boys and girls in caps and uniforms marching down Main Street. But for the adults who run Little League, the times are not so simple.

Volunteers now preside over increasingly sophisticated organizations that conduct criminal background checks on coaches, ask parents to sign codes of conduct, run Web sites that offer online registration, and even sell their own line of clothing.

"We've done everything to modernize our organization and bring ourselves into the 21st century," Beverly Little League President Thomas

ecstatic. It's just beautiful, and in perfect condition."

McGrath said he plans to use the private fields, which are nestled among a grove of trees, just for games, not for practices.

"I think this is going to be special to our teams," he said.

The Donovans could not be reached yesterday, but Whitesell said the idea for the project came about two years ago, when John Donovan asked if he could use one of the town's fields for a softball game. When Whitesell told

him there wasn't space during the sports season, he suggested he could build a field for the town.

"In my 30 years as a recreational professional, no one has ever done anything this phenomenal out of the goodness of his heart," she said.

For anyone wondering how to refer to the new playing area, Whitesell said she left that decision up to the man with the big idea.

"The Professor Donovan Fields," Whitesell said. "That's what he wants them called."

A big score: Hamilton couple build diamond for the town

By ANNA SCOTT
STAFF WRITER

HAMILTON — Some people donate team T-shirts. Others sell candy bars.

John and Linda Donovan of Hamilton did something extraordinary to support their local Little League — they built the players a baseball diamond with its very own sprinkler system.

For their good deed, John Donovan, a professor at MIT who has authored several books and owns land throughout Hamilton, Manchester and Essex, will ride in the front of this morning's Little League parade and throw out the first pitch at Cheeseman Field.

"What they've done here is so amazingly fantastic," said Maggie Whitesell, the town's recreation director. "People don't do this. I mean who does it? Kennedys and Rockefellers? Bill Gates?"

The Donovans cleared several acres of forest land they own on Sagamore Road, sodded it, and dug a well to install an irrigation system. In addition to building a baseball diamond — to the exact specifi-



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

This Little League field was built by John and Linda Donovan for the town of Hamilton.

cations mentioned in the Little League rule book — they also constructed a soccer field and a lacrosse field.

After two years of work on the fields, the Hamilton-Wenham youth sports teams will start playing there this season.

The Donovans, who live on Bay Road, will remain the owners of the land, but the team coaches have been given keys to the locked gate that marks the entrance to

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FIELD: Couple helping out Little League

the fields.

The gift is particularly meaningful to the Little League's 36 baseball teams, which serve 400 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 12.

The nine fields across Hamilton and Wenham haven't been enough to accommodate all the players, said Rich McGrath, president of Hamilton-Wenham Little League. Often two teams have to share one practice field, he said.

"This is like a dream come true," McGrath said. "The first time I walked on it, I really was

him there wasn't space during the sports season, he suggested he could build a field for the town.

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