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Orland Park Teen Leads Fundraising Effort to Create Challenger Baseball Field



Orland Park's Zachary Stack is on a mission to share the sport that he's played most of his life. Stack began playing baseball with the Orland Youth Association when he was four years old. He has played for the Warriors Travel Team since he was eight and now plays for the Warriors 16U Travel Team.

A lifelong resident of Orland Park, Stack is on a mission to add to the baseball offerings in the community with the development of a challenger baseball field. He is the eldest of Tammy and Ken Stack's three children.

"One of my sister's friends at Cardinal Bernardin School told me that he played a baseball game at a challenger's field. I had played ball at that complex and was somewhat familiar with the field," Stack explained. "When I found out that Orland Park didn't have something like this, I knew that I wanted to change that."

The term challenger field is a universal term to describe modified baseball fields. The Little League Challengers Program is an adaptive initiative created for individuals with physical or intellectual challenges. Any individual with these challenges can participate.

"I've played baseball most of my life and I think it would be really cool if I could help make it possible for everyone to play ball in Orland Park," Stack said.

The 15-year-old Marist High School sophomore played baseball and basketball freshman year and was a member of the school's math team that placed fifth in state. Stack will serve as a student ambassador during the coming academic year and will participate with the Model United Nations.

"When Zach brought his proposal to the village, we were immediately interested," said Trustee Pat Gira, chair of the village's Recreation and Parks Committee. "Orland Park has a very active, long running special recreation program with many Special Olympians but we've never had a challenger ballfield."

The Little League Challenger Division accommodates players ages four to 18 and up to 22 if enrolled in school. The Senior League Challenger Division accommodates players over the age of 15.

"Other towns have challenger fields and I thought this would be a great addition to all that Orland Park offers," Stack said. "I'm hoping the community comes together to help me make this a reality for Orland Park."

Challenger fields include a number of modifications to help those with special needs play baseball. These include open spaces between dug out benches to accommodate wheelchairs, a state-of-the-art pour and play surface and paved paths from the parking lot to the field.

"I'm very proud of Zach and the initiative he's shown," said Trustee Dan Calandriello. "Adding a challenger field for our athletes with special needs is huge. This opens up a whole new world for the village's special recreation program."

The estimated cost to bring a challenger field to the village's John Humphrey Sports Complex is \$500,000.

"If we raise enough money, I'd like to add restroom facilities at the site so players can avoid having to walk far to the nearest restroom," Stack explained.

An open area at the west end of the Humphrey Complex has been earmarked for the field at 14600 West Avenue.

"This area is perfect – the land is flat and parking is right there," Gira said. "This would be a great addition to Orland Park's Special Olympics Program."

Stack is reaching out to other young athletes from Marist and Carl Sandburg High Schools asking for their help to raise funds for the project. He has also been working closely with Orland Park Village Trustees Pat Gira and Dan Calandriello.

"We're thinking of a walk or a run, some type of kickoff celebration and reaching out to local foundations and businesses," Stack said. "Our first event will be hosting a booth at the Taste of Orland Park where we will accept donations and spread the word about what we're doing."

Of her son's quest to bring a challenger's field to Orland Park, Tammy Stack said, "My husband and I are very proud of Zach and what he wants to accomplish. It's going to be a great day in Orland Park when individuals with special needs can play baseball at the same complex as their peers and siblings. This is a great project for people now and for generations to come."