



How did Soccer end up at Packham ?

From the 1950s to the mid-1990s the premier soccer field in Stratford was located at FAG Bearings, now Schaeffler Canada, on Ontario Street. Originally it was one full sized field for the Stratford City Team and later in the 70's used by the Men's Industrial League. Over time several additional smaller fields were added to accommodate Youth players of various ages.

In the early 1990s I approached an adult re-training program to see if they wanted a project, that being the construction of a 50' x 24' structure to house change rooms, equipment storage and washrooms at FAG bearings. Stratford Youth Soccer requested financial assistance from the city of Stratford in the amount of \$30,000, to be paid back interest free over 10 years. This was paid back in full as per the agreement.

In the mid-1990s the property was sold to Zehr's and Youth Soccer was notified they had to move. Stratford Youth Soccer received cheques from Zehr's and FAG bearings in the amount of \$50,000 each, said funds to be used to relocate to other areas and to move the newly constructed building.

Through a contact at the Standard Products plant located on Erie Street at Packham Street. Soccer was offered the use of 11 acres of land surrounding the Standard Products plant, which had been rented out to a local farmer for growing corn.

A local soccer player who was attending the University of Guelph tested the soil for atrazine to ensure that grass could be grown on the property. The same student researched grass mixes suitable for playing fields along with potential suppliers.

Through soccer friendly farmers the property was worked and levelled in readiness for the grass. Soccer volunteers picked stones and in late August that year \$5000 worth of grass seed was sown on the 11 acres of land, by a soccer friendly landscaper.

The following year we borrowed a theodolite from a soccer friendly engineer and laid out four full sized

soccer fields on the property, to maximize the use of the land. We also laid out the footings to accept the building that had to be moved from the FAG property.

The building was moved, at a cost of approximately \$25,000 from FAG to the Standard products property. It was placed on footings supplied by a local soccer friendly contractor and was connected to services available, at that time water and hydro only.

A local manufacturing company donated time and material to construct four sets of goal frames, which were delivered to the site and installed by a soccer friendly contractor. Later that year 100 trees were planted throughout the site by Soccer volunteers.

A couple of years later, The city of Stratford purchased a 7 acre site beside the new soccer fields. It was identified that the area could accommodate two additional full sized soccer fields. Stratford youth soccer levelled the land thanks to Soccer friendly farmers and hired a drainage contractor to install drainage on the property. More grass seed was sown and additional goal frames were manufactured, delivered and installed as before.

From the mid 90s for a period of about six years the sport of soccer experienced a surge in enrolment at the youth level, virtually doubling over that timeframe. Adult soccer also became more popular, requiring soccer to construct additional fields. Accordingly, Stratford Youth Soccer also created and paid for those additional soccer fields at the standard products plant located on Douro Street.

Over that five to six year year period, Youth Soccer spent approximately \$250,000 developing the aforementioned properties. Had it not been for the thousands of hours of volunteer work, along with the generosity of the local farmers, contractors, landscapers and corporations this amount would likely have been 10 times that.

In 2006 the Stratford Soccer Association was created to be a voice for all soccer players in the community. When the Standard Products plant on Erie Street was sold to Feltz storage, the city was notified that the land was for sale and the asking price was \$650,000 for the original 11 acre parcel. At that time the community services department only had \$500,000 in a reserve fund and the Stratford Soccer Association committed to cover the remaining \$150,000 over a 15 year period. That commitment is still in place and is being paid as agreed.

Through the generosity of a soccer friendly and very community minded architect a number of conceptual plans were drawn up to improve the Packham facilities even more. The Stratford Soccer Association's vision was to convert the 18 acre site from being a 4 1/2 months a year soccer facility to an almost year round Community Park, with the addition of 2 km of accessible pedestrian and bicycle trails, fitness equipment located at various locations throughout the site, new change rooms and washrooms, a pavilion and a new artificial turf field which could be used many more months of the year.

A grant from Trillium was obtained by the Stratford Soccer Association for a feasibility study relating to

conversion of the area and the construction of an artificial turf field. A number of field trips were conducted across southwestern Ontario to view similar facilities and meetings were held with consultants and staff from other communities.

It was estimated that the construction of a fenced and flood lit, artificial turf field would be in the area of \$1.2 million. The proposal was made to Stratford City Council and the Stratford Soccer Association agreed to raise \$700,000, over time, towards the project. The Stratford Soccer Association solicited local businesses, corporations, service clubs and foundations and thanks to the generosity of the community raised that amount and more, through the naming rights of various components of the community park.

In addition to that the Stratford Soccer Association paid for additional lights at the main grass soccer field at a cost of over \$100,000. The estimated cost of the pavilion, change rooms and washroom facility was more than expected and has been tabled for the time being. The 2 km of trails and the fitness equipment will be installed and paid for by the Stratford Soccer Association in the very near future. The estimated cost of this phase is \$80,000.

Oh, and by the way, SSA is also fixing up the existing clubhouse with new siding thanks to the generosity of yet another local company. We are also paying for new washrooms at the facility including a fully accessible washroom.

These are the sorts of things that can happen when "Community driven projects" are presented to Council. We're not the first example and we won't be the last. In recent history the Splash pad on Downie, the skate park at Shakespeare Street, the Hospice at Greenwood Court and the Community Park at Erie and Packham are all great community projects. SSA fully realizes that funds are limited and the demands are many for the City and we are willing to do what we can to create a space where the entire community can come and enjoy.

Our next project is creating and installing (next spring) a couple of nesting sites for barn swallows..... in cooperation with students at Northwestern High School and the generosity of a local service club.