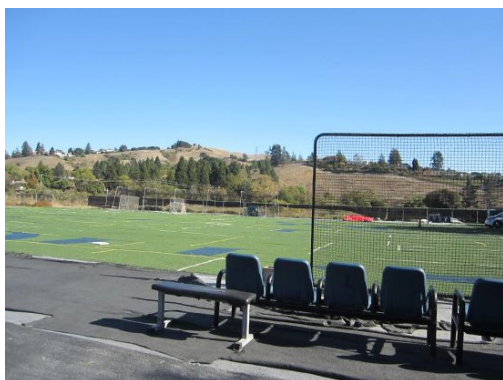


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## Bay Area Ballplayers vacating outdoor facility

By Vera Kochan



Ballplayer Field prior to this week's dismantling.  
Photo Vera Kochan

When many businesses struggled during COVID-related mandates, Bay Area Ballplayers owner Steve Hammond hit a home run by opening Ballplayer Field behind Moraga's Safeway. This extension of his Moraga Shopping Center's indoor facility allowed kids to keep up with their training despite the pandemic's challenges.

Ballplayer Field developed its offerings to include camps, birthday parties, baseball practice and clinics, outdoor batting cage rentals, and community events. However, they did this with the knowledge that the permits granted by the town were always going to be temporary, in order to allow for property development due to the Housing Element. "We never intended to do all of these outdoor activities," Hammond recalled. "They became part of our business and determined what ideas we have moving forward."

"The property owner isn't kicking us out (they have let us know from day 1 that as soon as a development is in the pipeline, they will give us notice and we'll be on our way)," stated Hammond on his website. "There is no impending development planned (this may change of course, but it's complicated and any development that does take place will likely need a few years to be ready to break ground)."

Hammond said, "I understand that the town wants it ready for development," and even though he would have liked to stay put while eventually upgrading Ballplayer Field into a more stylish and permanent facility, he didn't want to spend more money on attorney fees. "During our last approval, 18 months ago, the town's attorneys needed to be consulted which cost me thousands of dollars, and I was not told this up front. The total cost of getting a permit was becoming prohibitive."

Ballplayer Field's last day was Nov. 5, and it literally went down to the wire as several pre-booked parties had to be honored before it was time to roll up the turf. However, Hammond is in the process of searching for another more permanent location in Moraga that is zoned for what his facility offers. As such, he has approached both the Acalanes Union High School District and the Moraga School District with the idea of forming a type of partnership. At this point, MSD has proven to be the more receptive of the two, and the possibility of Ballplayer Field relocating to the seldom-used field at Los Perales Elementary School is probable.

"The Bay Area Ballplayers is a welcome small business to the Town of Moraga, and we are excited that Mr. Hammond is now working on a long-term solution for the continued growth of his business," stated Moraga's Planning Director Afshan Hamid. "The Town and the Planning Commission have worked with Mr. Hammond during and after COVID ended to facilitate and allow a temporary outdoor sports and training facility which is zoned to allow for mixed use and housing. The State, the Planning Commission, the Town Council and residents understand the importance of having housing sites available for all of Moraga. The Town's recent certified Housing Element demonstrates the community's desired long-term vision."

Having resigned himself to the move, Hammond's Oct. 4 statement on his website noted that "we have appreciated all of the support we've received along the way and are really happy with what we built and provided at our oasis by the trailer park. After months of discussion and research, we're (almost) at peace with the fact that we won't have a multi-use field across the parking lot from our indoor facility. Maybe this will be a blessing in disguise for a bigger and better opportunity to present itself in the future."

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