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## Passaic receives grant from for new field aimed at keeping baseball alive

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PASSAIC — Major League Baseball has chipped in \$250,000 to build the new multi-purpose field at Christopher Columbus Park, sowing seeds for the continued revival of the so-called “Summer Game” in the city.

Passaic received the grant through the Tomorrow Baseball Fund that it will apply toward the \$1.4 million field project. A bulldozer is tearing up the grass in front of School No. 11 on Monday to make way for an artificial turf field with lighting that should be ready for by next spring, officials say.

“We’ve always had a great baseball and softball community and I think Major League Baseball recognized that,” said Jessica Lezcano, Passaic’s recreation director. Lezcano added that more than 3,000 boys and girls are enrolled in baseball, softball, and t-ball programs in the city.

When it comes to baseball, Passaic is on a hot streak. One of the city’s youth teams, the Passaic Indians, went all the way this summer to the RBI World Series. RBI, which stands for Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, is a tournament sponsored by Major League Baseball.

Passaic applied for the grant at about the same time that it entered the RBI tournament, Lezcano said.

“The Indians success certainly drummed up a lot of interest,” she said.

The Baseball Tomorrow Fund is a joint initiative between Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association. Since its inception in 1999, the Baseball Tomorrow Fund has awarded more than 900 grants totaling \$30 million to non-profits and government organizations in the United States and around the world.

“The Baseball Tomorrow Fund is proud to support the youth baseball and softball programs in Passaic,” said Cathy Bradley, the executive director. “On behalf of Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association, we thank the City of Passaic for its continued efforts to increase youth participation in the game and look forward to seeing the Christopher Columbus field in full swing in 2017.”

To pay for the \$1.4 million renovation of Columbus Park, the city has pooled funding from the Passaic County Open Space Trust, the state’s Green Acres program, and the Passaic Board of Education.

This is the second grant that Passaic has received from the Tomorrow Baseball Fund. The artificial turf field installed at Pulaski Park a few years ago was partly paid for with money from the fund.

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RICH COWEN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A bulldozer clearing ground for a multi-purpose field at Christopher Columbus Park in Passaic. The Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a philanthropy run by the Major League Baseball and the Players Association, has given Passaic a \$250,000 grant for the the project.

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