

CentrevillePatch

SYA's "Fields of Dreams" Take Shape as a Sports Park

The nonprofit group searches for funds to complete a \$10 million project.

By [Mary C. Stachyra](#), editor *Centreville Patch*



The Southwestern Youth Association (SYA) is in the midst of a \$10 million project to complete a sports park off of Bull Run Post Office Road. The group runs all kinds of sports for children year-round, including camps such as this one during the summer.



Hidden on the outskirts of Centreville, yet just miles from the cars rushing by on I-66 and Lee Highway, lies an oasis of wooded areas and open fields.

The [Southwestern Youth Association](#) Sports Park—once 120 acres of a sod farm—is rapidly transforming from undeveloped "Fields of Dreams" to an area for local families to take a walk with the dog, watch their kids play sports, stroll along nature trails and enjoy community events. When the project is complete, there will be 13 fields of various shapes and sizes for sports ranging from football to field hockey.

"In all my research, I've not seen a park like this built by a private, nonprofit group," Gary Flather, president of SYA's board of directors said.

Though the group purchased land for the project back in 1998, it was not until this year that phase one (out of two stages for the project) was complete. Hundreds of Centreville kids now play baseball, soccer and other sports on fields adjacent to the [Manassas National Battlefield](#). Although the park is primarily for the kids, SYA is also hoping that it will become a gathering place for community events

in the future, starting with a "Field Day" this October. It's no secret that there aren't a lot of community festivals and events tailored just for Centreville-area families (notable exceptions include the resurrected [Centreville Day](#) and [Starlight Cinema](#)). The park may help fill in that gap.

Finding such an immense area of available land wasn't easy, though. Jeff Stein, SYA's soccer commissioner spent a tremendous amount of time searching for areas of land that would be large enough for the park's purposes. "I ran the tax records and wrote a letter to basically every landowner in this part of Fairfax County," said Stein.

The timing couldn't have been better. In line with Centreville's transformation from a once-rural community to a full-fledged suburb filled with luxury condos and homeowners associations, a sod farm off of Bull Run Post Office Road was preparing to shut down and consolidate its operations elsewhere in Virginia. Over the years, secluded mansions have sprung up along the road near the older, modest single-family homes. Fortunately for SYA, the owners didn't sell it to developers, but instead offered it to the nonprofit organization for a price within reach and offered to hold financing for ten years to boot.

As the project progressed, SYA changed the name of the project from its initial "Fields of Dreams" to calling it a sports park, and it now has a brand-new logo. Once phase two is complete, another 80-90 acres will be developed with changes to include a professional-style stadium, a full course for cross-country runners (including CVHS and Westfield teams), a sand volleyball court with lights, a pavilion and snack bars. The trails on SYA land will eventually, SYA directors hope, join up with county walking trails.

Buying 120 acres and making renovations on the land wasn't cheap, though, especially in Fairfax County. The estimated total cost for the project is \$10 million. The group has already spent about \$2 million and will be searching for additional funds from corporations, softball and baseball organizations, grants and local businesses. Many of those local businesses and SYA families have already kicked in to contribute. In the future, they will also work on fundraisers like a "fright night" in October, golf tournaments and a casino night. Their ["Buy a Brick"](#) fundraiser is already in full swing. The community has also pitched in to do improvements for free—for example, a [Westfield High School](#) Eagle Scout built a bridge for one of the trails, and two more are working on "fitness stations" for along the trail.

One of the biggest things for SYA right now, though, is to continue to raise awareness of the project.

"We need to let people know that we're here," said Stein.