

**Business, Sports**

## Poway's Sportsplex USA Heavy Hitter in East County

Former Chicago restaurant owner scores with adult league softball and soccer fields.

By [Tom York](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 18, 2010



Do you play at the Sportsplex? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

Since opening a 17-acre sports park featuring three softball playing fields and two soccer fields in Santee this summer, Poway-based [Sportsplex USA](#) has been drawing boffo business.

Thousands of players and their friends and family are pouring into the city each week, putting smiles on municipal big whigs.

Bill Berghoff, president at Sportsplex USA, notes the softball fields are fully booked through the end of the year.

"We're sold out," he said.

Nothing new to Sportsplex USA, which has operated a 15-acre sister facility at Stowe Drive and Mcivers Court in Poway since 1993.

The field has been operating at capacity for most of the decade, said Sportsplex USA marketing executive Chris Vertrees.

It draws 350,000 visitors a year.

The two amateur leagues sports park is the brainchild of founder and Chairman Paul Berghoff, a high-profile owner of a 100-year-old Chicago restaurant before he sold out two decades ago to head west.

The Berghoffs concluded that they had such a good business idea in the Poway site that they decided to open a consulting arm in 2003, and have been working hard to take that template to other communities.

The Santee site represents their most successful effort to date, but Vertrees said the business is also developing projects with the city of Fairfield in the Bay Area, as well as a \$11.5 million project in Pasco County, FL, a 45-minute drive north of Tampa Bay.

The business concentrates efforts in California, Florida and Texas because of the temperate climate, which offers year-round play, Vertrees said.

Sportsplex USA's closet competitor is Chino Hills-based Big League Dreams Sports Parks, which built its first park in 1998. It operates 10 sports parks, according to its website.

The Sportsplex USA fields can be big money makers for local economies. For example, the new Santee site is projected to generate more than \$5.5 million a year in spending. Poway has been posting similar numbers for more than 10 years.

The Poway facility draws players and their families from all over Southern California. The complex features such amenities as batting cages, plus a 100-seat casual dining restaurant that serves beer and wine.

Sportsplex enters into what it calls a public/private partnership, leasing the land in return for development and operating rights.

For example, in Poway, in return for building and managing the facility, Sportsplex USA gives the city a 7- to 8-percent share of gross sales.

The Poway company pays for all expenses required to operate the facility and accommodate on-the-field activities. The lighting bill alone can run \$100,000 a

year.

The two sites employ about 25 workers, eight full-time, the rest part-time.

Vertrees says Poway employs up to 60 to 70 part-time workers at any time over the course of a year, which makes it an even bigger contributor to the economy.

More than 80 percent of all workers come from a 15-mile radius around Poway.

Jobs range from ticket sellers to grounds keepers.

Paul Byrne, chair elect of the Poway Chamber of Commerce board of directors and CEO of San Diego-based ReadyTECH Inc., says Sportsplex USA has proven to be a solid corporate citizen in the 17 years that it has called Poway home.

"They're good people with a solid reputation, and contributed greatly to the local economy," Byrne said. He says chamber officials are in talks with the Sportsplex to host team-building events to enhance the camaraderie as members battle the recession.

"We want to leverage our relationship by doing some site events and other activities to help build our membership," he said.

---