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Baltimore's Best Kept Secret Reaches 50-Million-Dollar Milestone

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Fifty million dollars is a windfall any number of us would naturally relish the opportunity to bank for personal profit.

As meaningful as it would be for one person or family, consider the possibilities when resources of that magnitude are invested into underprivileged communities, entrenched in socioeconomic sludge. Each dollar donated suddenly becomes a multiplier, touching the lives of many. When I first spoke to the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation (CRSF) one year ago, their organization struck me as the ultimate multiplier, watering figurative seeds in forgotten people and places.

Donating approximately one million dollars per park constructed, CRSF not only improves the landscape and value of neighborhoods with Youth Development Parks, they provide safe and clean environments for neighborhood children to play and learn. These gifts to communities awaken hope, increase opportunities and connect families with coaches for sport and life. Eleven of the fields are also Adaptive Youth Development Parks, specifically designed for youth with special needs who have an equally strong need for exercise, socialization and a sense of belonging.



Pictured left to right: Cal Ripken Jr., Vice Chairman and Steve Salem, President, Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation

I recently discovered that September 29 would mark a 50-park milestone. Naming their upcoming park Freedom Field, at Marquette Park in Chicago, it is the historic site of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s march against education discrimination and workforce segregation in 1965. Marquette Park is more recently renowned for gang activity and Freedom Field is a deliberate effort to provide area children with a safe haven. This thoughtful approach to integrating regional history with community ties appears to be a core element of each project.

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"When we first started the foundation in memory of Dad we never imagined it would grow the way it has. We would have been happy helping a few kids in a real and significant way but to see it operating across the country just blows us away." said Cal Ripken Jr., of what he envisioned when launching CRSF as a small grassroots non-profit. "When the board first introduced the idea of building 50 fields in five years I thought it was unattainable, but here we are on the verge of unveiling that 50th Youth Development Park. Its very gratifying."

Baltimore based sporting apparel company Under Armour is also credited by Ripken and CRSF, with extending remarkable support towards their community service efforts. Stacey Ullrich, Director of Global Philanthropy for Under Armour explained the motivation behind their partnership, "For Under Armour, Give Back efforts are in our DNA, and contributing to the cities we call home has always been a priority. We are empowering the next generation of athletes by providing them with first-class facilities, incredible sports programs, and the best apparel. One of the best ways we can do this is through partnerships with strong nonprofits like CRSF that serve the needs of young people from underserved circumstances, using sport as a vehicle to dictate their own destiny."

To date, CRSF has assisted over one million children, with parks across the United States. Run with a combination of business and heart, they are committed to helping shape the leaders of tomorrow in an undeniable way. CRSF President, Steve Salem said while smiling, "The more money we can raise, the more we can give away, and the happier we are." As the machine behind extraordinary fund raising efforts, Salem's purpose driven approach is awe-inspiring.

One hundred years ago, Helen Keller poignantly stated, "alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." This statement still rings true. If you would like more information about the September 29 launch of Chicago's Freedom Field park, or are interested in learning more about CRSF programming, contact Steve Salem at ssalem@ripkenfoundation.org. You can also find them on Facebook and Twitter.