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Islip IDA, investors team up on recreation deal

By David Winzelberg

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It's a very big idea. But the three sports veterans behind the newest and largest indoor athletics center on Long Island want you to know it's not just a lot of hot air.

Former Nassau County Deputy Parks and Recreation Commissioner Jerry Seckler, United States Basketball League Director of Operations Ed Krinsky and former school district athletic director Alan Butler have teamed up to develop and operate the biggest indoor sports bubble ever on Long Island.

The partnership, going by the name Long Island Partnership for Sport and Cultural Development, was formed in 1991 to assist Nassau County in developing sports and cultural programs. It was recently picked by the Town of Islip to construct the 162,000-square-foot sports center on 10.6 acres straddling Lowell Avenue and Clayton Street in Central Islip.

The town circulated requests for proposals for the recreational facility in April 2006, and chose LIPSCD to design, build and operate the complex with \$11 million in Islip Industrial Development Agency bonds.

"This project has been in the planning stages for decades, and now it is time to enter the implementation stage," Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan said on the town's Web site, but Nolan cautioned that "the devil is often in the details" when it comes to private-public partnerships, like the one proposed for Central Islip.

The Central Islip land will be leased from the town by LIPSCD for its big bubble, dubbed the Long Island Sports and Recreation Center. As part of the deal, its owners have agreed to contribute \$1.2 million toward a new 15,000-square-foot recreation center next to the existing community center across the street.

Even with the high public demand for places to play, Sports Plus in Lake Grove, indoor ice rink and all, closed for good earlier this year. The Island Garden in West Hempstead – one-time home of the ABA's New York Nets basketball franchise – was reincarnated in 1998 as a Mecca for youth leagues and has gone through a couple of owners since.

But according to Seckler, a former wrestling coach at Columbia University, Krinsky, a former scout for the Detroit Pistons and Houston Rockets, and Butler, a former Long Island lacrosse coach of the year, those places didn't lack customers. The three are confident they'll have a steady stream of business in Central Islip, too; they've already signed up 17 leagues and camps for over \$2.5 million in field- and court-time revenue, four months before the sports center is scheduled to open.

The group began working on plans for the sports dome three years ago, according to Seckler, who said the structure will be designed by Ward Associates in Bohemia and constructed by Asati of Rye Brook – the same company that has built bubbles for the New York Jets, the Miami Dolphins and Rutgers University, to name a few big-name clients.

With about four acres of continuous indoor space, the Central Islip dome will have nine flexible athletic areas, including 72,000 square feet of synthetic turf fields, three hardwood gymnasiums, locker rooms, bleachers, office space, a health and fitness area and a café. The fields and courts are flexible because they can be quickly changed to accommodate lacrosse, soccer, football, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, rugby, gymnastics, softball, concerts, trade shows and other events, according to the LIPSCD. Construction is slated to begin soon, weather permitting, and Seckler said the bubble may be open for business by spring.

"It's going to change the way things are done in recreation around the country," Seckler said.

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