

# Community dream reality

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G. PROCAYLO/SUN MEDIA

Jaylene (left) and Cayden St. Laurent with Bobby St. Laurent, Steve Mymko and Curt Ramsden at the new park.

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After more than four years, about \$6 million and some 150 acres of construction, organizers of Winnipeg's new field of dreams have covered a lot of ground.

They say it's the biggest multi-use park of its kind in Canada. And they will officially say, "Play ball," at Buhler Recreation Park in Transcona on May 24.

"One dream, a community of partners. That's how it's all played out," said Steve Mymko, the park's facilities manager. "Everything that's gone on here is incredible."

The opening of the expan-

## Buhler Recreation Park opens

sive Murdock Road facility is a culmination of years of struggles by volunteers to raise funds and acquire government assistance to build the kind of community complex they had long seen a dire need for in east Winnipeg.

This summer, the park expects to have at least 250,000 visitors who will play or watch at four softball diamonds, a hardball field, a half-dozen soccer pitches and a BMX cycling track. Even before the official opening, the park will be broken in this weekend by the largest-ever of 17 annual Kildonan Sports Pre-Season

Classic slo-pitch tournaments.

"This is the first event ever being held here," said event organizer Bobby St. Laurent. "And this is probably the largest tournament in the city in a long, long time."

The park itself developed through a desire among several east end residents to give their district more quality places to play. Led largely by the East Winnipeg Sports Association, grassroots fundraising eventually pulled in about \$1.5 million, including help from the likes of Manitoba Lotteries Corp., New Flyer Industries, Casera Credit

Union, Qualico Homes and the Winnipeg Foundation. Industry magnate John Buhler and his wife Bonnie also kicked in \$500,000.

When it's fully up and running within the next couple of years, the park is expected to bring in 400,000 people annually for more than 20 activities in various seasons — including pond hockey, cross-country skiing, flag football and tobogganing.

Mymko said the facility is almost totally booked for 2008 and he anticipates the facility will bring \$10 million "of new money into the city economy every year."

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