

Sports facility gets nod

Complex for disabled a first in the province

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Two decades ago, the tears of a rejected 12-year-old boy planted a dream with Egidio Novoletto.

Today, a little hard work, a lot of civic co-operation and the "can do" spirit of one of Windsor's most socially involved families is making that dream of a sports complex for the physically and mentally challenged come true for Novoletto.

Novoletto, founder of the Windsor and district Italian Canadian Handicapped Association (ICHA), saw his sports complex dream clear the first hurdle when his proposal for the city to provide the land for the site passed council earlier this week.

"I nearly fell flat on my face," Novoletto said Wednesday, describing his reaction to council's support for a project that will be the first of its kind in Ontario and one of only a few in North America. "This will benefit all the disabled. They're going to have a place to play. It's unbelievable."

Idea formed

Novoletto said the idea came from a conversation he had with local developer Vince Rosati back in 1977, after Novoletto's mentally handicapped son was not allowed to play in a soccer game.

One of his sons, Paulo, had been injured in a minor soccer game. His other son, Peter, wanted to fill in for his brother but was told he could not play "because he was different."

"He (Rosati) said whenever you need me, I'll be around to help," recalled Novoletto. "He said just come and see me."

Now Rosati, owner of Rosati Construction — and the man whose family business will build the facility — is helping to secure the support of other levels of government and will begin raising funds toward the \$2-mil-



Vince Rosati, right, of the Rosati Group and Egidio Novoletto, founder of the Italian Canadian Handicapped Association, are excited about their plans for a sports complex for the physically and mentally challenged to be built at Mic Mac Park.

Star photo: Nick Brancaccio

lion cost of the project.

The Rosati family kicked off the drive with a \$100,000 pledge.

"I don't foresee a problem raising money," Rosati said. "We're going to start knocking on doors. This is where the hard work begins. But, who could say no?"

Rosati said, with a bit of luck and good will, the cash could be raised within "three or four months" and the shovel could be in the ground by next spring.

City Council entered into a partnership with the association Tuesday to allow the project to go ahead. Under terms of the agreement, the facility will be built in Mic Mac Park.

The complex will include one full-size indoor soccer facility, four bocce ball courts, four volleyball courts, basketball courts, a multi-purpose conference room, games room, a kitchen, training facilities, change rooms and a track.

The proposal calls for the city to lease a 1½-acre portion of the park to the ICHA for \$1 per year for 25 years, with an option for two more 25-year terms to follow.

In addition, the city would be required to provide site servicing, including storm and sanitary sewer

hookups and hydro at an estimated cost of \$30,000.

Furthermore, the city would exempt the ICHA from property tax and development charges on the project. The ICHA will carry \$5 million in liability insurance.

"This would not have been possible without city council's co-operation," said Rosati.

"It can only work if everyone gets involved. To put up a building seems easy, but it's not easy. You need help and we're getting it."

Novoletto began a soccer program for the mentally challenged. In 1985, the ICHA was born and is now one of the largest organizations of its kind in Ontario.

Played host

For the past 12 years, the ICHA has played host to the largest Special Olympics-sanctioned indoor soccer tournament in Canada.

Novoletto said the goal is to provide a state-of-the-art facility for mentally and physically handicapped people to serve Windsor and Essex County.

"I'm very grateful to Vince Rosati, to City Council and to Parks and Recreation," said Novoletto. "It's a dream come true."