

Monday, May 08, 2006

No. 36

www.nyc.gov/parks

Parks & Recreation, Consumer Affairs & Alfonso Little League Cut Ribbon At Renovated Highbridge Ballfield

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe joined officials from the Department of Consumer Affairs and the Alfonso Little League on Saturday, May 6 to celebrate the completion of restorations to Highbridge Ballfield # 1.

This facility was reconstructed at a cost of approximately \$300,000. Of that amount, \$123,000 was paid for by a settlement secured by the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs in 2005 with MLB Advanced Media, L.P. (MLBAM) – which operates and maintains Major League Baseball's official web site, and is owned equally by all 30 baseball teams – to settle the agency's lawsuit charging deceptive practices. In addition to paying for the reconstruction of this ballfield, the settlement also paid for new uniforms and equipment for four Alfonso Little League teams that regularly utilize the field. The rest of the funds for this project were generously allocated by the Mayor's Office.

This project included regrading the ballfield free of old rock outcroppings that interfered with play, and installing a new outfield fence, bleachers, dugouts, backstop, drinking fountain, red warning track, ground hydrant and irrigation accessories. The new ballfield will be enjoyed by little leaguers from the community.

"Thanks to the watchful eye of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Highbridge Ballfield is a vastly improved place for local youth leagues to enjoy," said Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. "By resodding, re-irrigating, and restructuring this ballfield, children will have the opportunity to practice their skills right across the street from where Yankee great Lou Gehrig grew up. Now Washington Heights is again an incubator of baseball talent for Dominican-American residents including Manny Ramirez. I am grateful to DCA for negotiating this settlement, as well as to Mayor Bloomberg for helping to fund this important project."

"We're thrilled that the residents and community of Washington Heights can benefit from our efforts to protect consumers," said Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "This is a home run for the kids who are now able to enjoy a restored Highbridge Ballfield. We thank our colleagues at the Parks Department for helping to identify where the settlement could best be utilized."

The DCA filed a lawsuit against MLBAM in New York State Supreme Court in April 2004 charging that MLBAM violated the City's laws and rules against deceptive advertising through email promotions sent to thousands of local fans. As part of the settlement secured in April 2005, MLBAM paid \$123,000 to New York City for restoration of Highbridge Park Ballfield and new uniforms and equipment for four Alfonso Little League teams. They also paid an additional \$60,000 to New York City. In addition, Steiner Sports Memorabilia Inc. settled charges by paying \$16,666 to New York City, \$340 in restitution to two City consumers who purchased autographed balls in response to the promotion and contributed memorabilia with a wholesale value of \$33,333 to the City to be sold by CityStore, the Official Store of the City

of New York.

Highbridge Park, at 119 acres, is northern Manhattan's second-largest park. It has been the focus of a targeted restoration and clean up in which Parks & Recreation has partnered with Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project and the City Parks Foundation to bring public and private funds and neighborhood residents and environmental organizations to the effort. This Washington Heights park hugs a dramatic cliff overlooking the Harlem River, and stretches from 155th Street on the south to Dyckman Street on the north.

CONTACT: CONTACT: Warner Johnston / Phil Abramson (Parks) (212) 360-1311 / Dina Improta Roskin (DCA) (212) 487-4283