

Ballpark for disabled kids becomes reality

■ Tigers' Casey helps with groundbreaking.

By Mitch Hotts

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

If there ever was a field of dreams, Marilyn Wittstock is watching it happen in Clinton Township.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Wednesday for the new Norm Hott Field, a specially designed baseball field for children with disabilities, in Neil Reid Park on Harper, north of Metropolitan Parkway.

"It's finally going to happen," said Marilyn Wittstock, a driving force behind the field.

Detroit Tigers first baseman Sean Casey, along with his wife, Mandi Casey, was on hand for the groundbreaking festivities. The field is named after Mandi Casey's grandfather.

The field has been a dream of the Clinton Valley Little League Challenger Division, which allows children with disabilities ages 5-18 to play baseball.

The special aspect of the field is it is designed for disabled kids. For example, the baselines are shorter, the pitching mound is closer to the plate and the outfield distances are shorter. And it's the only one of its kind in Michigan, organizers said.

Cost for the baseball diamond was \$30,000 and came about as a



Macomb Daily photos by Bill Eisner

Detroit Tigers first baseman Sean Casey holds up a special shovel made out of a baseball bat for the groundbreaking ceremony.

community effort. The Detroit Tigers and Sean Casey, along with Bill LaKritz of LaKritz-Weber Company and the late Tony Filippis Sr. of Wright & Filippis, were all financial contributors.

Casey told The Macomb Daily he was once paired up with a Challenger League player in Akron, Ohio and was deeply touched by the experience. That's one of the reasons why he wanted to be involved with this project.

Filippis, who died this past January, started his prosthetics company after losing his leg in a train accident. Organizers said he was instrumental in securing a location for the diamond.

LaKritz donated \$10,000 and his time toward the project, while the Detroit Tigers Foundation kicked in \$10,000 and Casey and his wife also donated, along with various local service clubs.

Architectural services were provided by Mark McBride and the Clinton Township engineering and public works departments. Wittstock, vice president of the Challenger Division, said seeding of the field will begin in September and it should be ready for play by spring 2008.

For more information on the league, call (586) 781-5547.



Mandi and Sean Casey and their children line up for the groundbreaking along with Marilyn Wittstock, vice president of the Clinton Valley Challenger Division, and Clinton Township Supervisor Robert Cannon.