

LRC gearing up for baseball, softball season



At this point in the year, it isn't uncommon to see the ballfields at Lewis-Young Park packed full of parents and players creating summer memories on the diamond.

This year, however, is anything but normal.

Like the rest of us, the Louisburg Recreation Commission has found that out first hand as the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to quickly come up with new programs, cancel seasons and try their best to keep others going.

That is what LRC director Diana Moore and the LRC board did as they revamped plans and provided programming while people were stuck at home.

"The crazy thing was the governor closed the schools on March 17 and ironically we had a board meeting that night," Moore said. "It was a very emotional day all-around. The board wanted to see what we could do with virtual stuff and the next day we just got to work. We came up with virtual classes so we had like cooking classes, yoga and other stuff like that.

"Then we did the social distance Easter scavenger hunt. We had to work with the police department, city hall and the health department people, but it was fun. Wine testing and cookie decorating along with a virtual fishing department. We did Bingo and Wheel of Fortune on Friday nights. We just changed how we did things, but we were still getting ready for

sports.”

Baseball and softball were still on the forefront of the LRC’s minds as they waited for guidelines to reopen, which changed on a weekly, and sometimes, daily basis. The rec commission was forced to cancel the spring soccer season and many on the board didn’t want the same thing to happen to baseball and softball.

The only question would be is would they have the time to get it all in. As it turned out, they had just enough to work with.

When Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly shifted powers to each individual county, it gave members of the commission a good feel on what they had to do to get sports going again.

Normally, practice starts in April, but with a tight time schedule, the older baseball and softball teams started practice on June 15, while the T-Ball and coach pitch teams will begin on June 22. Games will then begin for everyone on June 29.

For guidance, Moore attended Zoom meetings with the Kansas Recreation and Park Association to learn what guidelines they would have to adhere to when games started again.

“We had many meetings with the KRPA and they have guidelines for reopening everything from how we open the concession, how we sanitize the restroom and how to socially distance,” Moore said. “A couple of the big changes will be that parents won’t sit in the bleachers and they will have to bring their own chairs. Families will be together but they will have to social distance around the fields. We are going to move the bleachers closer and use them as extended dugouts.

“We bought cleaning stuff, so we have spray down the dugouts, bleachers and restrooms after each practice or game. We are trying to do more doubleheaders and try to eliminate extra

people crossing each other's paths. For t-ball, I think I will have them sit with their parents when they bat since there are no bleachers there."

Although they are limited to what they can sell, the LRC will also be running a concession stand each night with prepackaged items and sealed drinks. That means no nachos, hot dogs or popcorn.

There will also be two umpires in each game, but they will be eliminating the home plate umpire and instead have two out in the field, with one calling balls and strikes from there. Players will also need to make sure they have their own glove and helmet.

"Normally the umpires will get balls from the home team, but the umpires will no longer touch the balls," Moore said. "When your team is out on the field, you will use your balls and vice versa. Trying to eliminate as much of the sharing stuff as we can. We also had to put social distance signs all-around. There just needs to be constant reminders.

"Glove and helmet – anything you wear has to be your own. There will be no catcher for 8-and-under and it also freed up catching gear to where we could have two sets for 10s, 12s and 14s."

In the last couple of months, Moore has been frantically meeting with other towns to try and figure out a schedule. Towns they would normally schedule with, like Paola and Osawatomie, didn't have the numbers to put together teams – while Garnett was able to field two baseball teams.

That left Louisburg teams having to play each other, which Moore was able to make work. Louisburg had more than 300 kids sign up for baseball and softball, which was down from about 400 a year ago.

"Numbers weren't way down," Moore said. "We had some that had

to pull out due to other plans, but we had more on the wait list than more than we had back out and we were able to get everybody in.

“When the rec directors got together early on, we decided we were going to go with the town that had the stricter rules. We have found a lot of people in the smaller towns are out of work and the kids can’t afford to play. So many of the towns we were supposed to play, couldn’t field teams so we are just trying to keep it all Louisburg. Then for softball we only have one 12-and-under softball team, but we have lined up with a couple local traveling teams that play up in the city and they are going to help us get more games as well.”

The LRC also has a new addition to its staff as Louisburg resident Amy Buffington was hired to be the new recreation coordinator and she is looking forward to what lies in store.

“I am very excited to be on board here,” Buffington said. “I already knew that Diana and the rec did a lot, but when I started here I quickly realized it was even more than I originally thought. I am really looking forward to working alongside everyone.”

Moore also knows that Buffington was the right person for job and that she will be a great asset to the LRC.

“It is awesome having Amy because she already knows Louisburg,” Moore said. “She knows the families, knows the kids, the town and the sports. She already knew what we were doing and that was a slam dunk to me. She came in with ideas and she will be a big help for sure. A year from now, I really think we can play off each other’s strengths.”