

Business, Sports

New Sportsplex Is Champion of Local Economy

The 15-acre facility on Riverwalk Drive is drawing huge crowds and pumping up business.

By [Tom York](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 12, 2010



What do you think of the Sportsplex? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

The 4-month-old [Sportsplex USA](#) on Riverwalk Drive has hit an unexpected grand slam with [Santee city](#) officials.

The facility, a public/private partnership between Santee and [Sportsplex USA](#) in Poway, is drawing tens of thousands of softball and soccer players, plus family and friends, to the city each week—much better than earlier projections.

The crowds are spending money on restaurants and retail shops every weeknight and weekend.

"The [softball](#) fields are fully booked," said Bill Berghoff, president at Sportsplex USA, which has operated a similar park in Poway since 1994. "We're sold out."

Berghoff noted, for example, that adult co-ed softball league play is booked through the end of the year, which means that 26 teams play each weekday night. The fields are also booked every weekend through Dec. 31, and into 2011.

The facility draws players and supporters from all over Southern California, especially on weekends.

Berghoff said one five-day youth tournament drew 200 teams and their supporters, including one team from as far away as Vietnam.

The 15-acre complex, which opened June 1 in the 55-acre Town Center Community Park, includes three softball/baseball fields, two soccer arenas, four batting cages and a sports restaurants. It is projected to draw more than 350,000 visitors and generate more than \$5.5 million a year in economic activity.

Sportsplex manages the park and pays for all expenses required to operate the facility and accommodate on-the-field activities, giving Santee 7 percent to 8 percent of the gross revenue.

The city in turn, uses the money to improve and operate other city-owned facilities within the Town Center Community Park.

The lighting bill alone will run \$100,000, said Berghoff, which means the city has few worries about costs and other headaches.

Sportsplex employs around 25 workers—eight full time.

Santee Chamber of Commerce President John Olson said the popularity of the playing fields has led to unexpected increases in retail sales tax revenue in recent months. "We're pleased with that," he said.

"It's really helped to pump up business. And helped the city at the same time."

The increase in Santee's economic activity, in turn, has caught the eye of national operators looking for new sites, Olson said.

He notes several fast-food chains and hotels are looking at Santee and believes that a few "announcements could be made" as construction of the state Highway 52 extension to Highway 67 winds up in January.

Meanwhile, City Manager Keith Till said in a prepared statement that the project has proved to be far more than a place for recreation.

"It's an economic boost to Santee," he said.
