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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community First CU naming commitment puts Lakemen Field fundraising over \$475,000 goal

WAUPACA – A significant contribution from Community First Credit Union has pushed the fundraising for Phase 1 of the Lakemen Field redevelopment beyond its \$475,000 goal.

The naming sponsorship commitment means that work will begin next spring on the planned ballpark lighting system improvements at what will be known as Community First Lakemen Field, according to Waupaca Park and Recreation Director Laura Colbert and Josh Peterson, Lakemen General Manager.

Community First's naming commitment provides a huge boost and reflects a major step toward restoring Waupaca's long-standing baseball heritage. They said other first phase improvements will start in the fall of 2024, including construction of a new infield (with a 25+ year lifespan; last renovated in 1993) and installation of a new speaker/sound system. Additional work (yet to be determined) will be possible since funding has exceeded the initial goal.

In addition to the gift from Community First, the fundraising campaign for Phase 1 has received \$141,000 in private donations, \$25,000 in grants and \$175,000 from the city (funds included in the 2024 Waupaca city budget) as of Dec. 1.

"We couldn't be more appreciative of the generosity that our community has shown towards this project," said Colbert, who said installation of modern ballpark lights and poles (originally installed in 1976) will be accelerated to next spring due to ongoing safety and maintenance issues.

“We never thought it would be possible to move forward with the next phase of this plan so quickly,” she said. “Community First Lakemen Field will become a destination for ball players across the state and beyond.”

“Our players and coaches will be thrilled to play on a safe, state-of-the-art field and to share the love of the game with their many fans,” said Peterson, who like many from the area grew up practicing and playing Dairyland, American Legion, Babe Ruth and high school baseball at Lakemen Field. “Thanks to all of our donors, including Community First Credit Union and the City of Waupaca, for making this a reality.”

A preliminary master plan for redevelopment of Lakemen Athletic Field by Rettler Corp., a Steven Point landscape design and architecture firm, was presented to the city last spring. It suggested a phased approach to upgrades that carry an overall cost of just under \$2 million. Future improvements include: a bathroom and concession building, an additional batting cage, right field fence adjustment, backstop, dugouts and 44-stall parking lot.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to be part of Lakemen Field’s restoration/revitalization – honoring the Waupaca community’s strong baseball heritage and ensuring it will continue to serve as a community gathering place for all ages for years to come,” said Community First’s Amanda Secor.

Other major donors to the project included \$25,000 each from L&L Propane and Farmers State Bank. Grants of \$10,000 each have been received from the Waupaca Area Convention and Visitor’s Bureau and from an anonymous donor through the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley Region. The Wisconsin Timber Rattlers Give Back Program also awarded a \$5,000 grant.

“As we move into our next phase for this project, please note that we are abundantly grateful for all that have given,” said Peterson. “If you are interested in helping with this project, we are still accepting donations and that every little bit helps.”

To learn more or make an online tax-deductible donation to the Community First Lakemen Field project, click on the donate or fundraising information tabs at the [Friends of Waupaca Parks website](#).

About Friends of Waupaca Parks: *Friends of Waupaca Parks is part of the Waupaca County Natural Resources Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit organization that supports the values of the Waupaca Parks and Recreation Department. Its goal is connecting people to the natural park spaces that our community offers and keeping the city’s parks viable for future generations.*