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Soccer fields to be upgraded



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Soccer won the lion's share of an \$8.3 million grant awarded to the Anchorage Park Foundation. (Jason Kohler/KTUU-TV)



Diane Kaplan, president of the Rasmuson Foundation, said the soccer fields serve the community. (Jason Kohler/KTUU-TV)



Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich said the \$8.3 million grant has the potential to bring even more. (Jason Kohler/KTUU-TV)

by Rhonda McBride
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- Anchorage soccer fields are headed for a makeover, thanks to a multi-million dollar gift from the Rasmuson Foundation.

Soccer won the lion's share of an \$8.3 million grant awarded to the Anchorage Park Foundation.

Local soccer players definitely got a kick out of the news that green is coming to Anchorage soccer fields in the form of \$6 million.

Eva Cress said she has been playing soccer since she was 6. She said fields around Anchorage could use the repairs.

"Just like dirt everywhere, like potholes. Twisted ankles," Cress said.

Danny Reynolds with the Anchorage Youth Soccer Club said the dusty fields are problematic.

"There isn't any grass here. If you get a lot of people here, it's gets really dusty and dirty and the ball doesn't roll real well," Reynolds said.

What green there is on the field is chamomile, not quite a soccer player's cup of tea.

Diane Kaplan, president of the Rasmuson Foundation, said the soccer fields serve the community.

"We have over 14,000 kids in this town that play soccer," Kaplan said.

Kaplan also put everyone on notice that strings are attached to the grants. They require a match from the community in donations or volunteerism.

Rasmuson challenge grants last year raised an additional \$845,000 in community resources for city parks. Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich said this \$8.3 million grant has the potential to bring even more.

"That's the beauty of this grant by the Rasmuson Foundation; it will just leverage out to millions more," Begich said.

The official amount could reach as high as \$17 million. For kids



The Anchorage Park Foundation also received \$900,000 to expand its summer youth employment program. (Jason Kohler/KTUU-TV)

like Ethan Krauss, it's money well spent.

"I know a lot of people who have done drugs and then gotten into soccer and they stopped. There's plenty of kids who sit around play video games. You've seen 'Super Size Me,' -- you get bigger," Krauss said.

Oddly enough, there were no overweight kids playing at the parks Channel 2 News visited.

Soccer club coach Mike Oliver said the upgrades to Anchorage soccer fields could extend the playing season and open up soccer to more children.

"It's just an investment in the future -- without sounding too cheesy -- that's really what it is. They're going to have things that they can dream about. They can have goals that they can try to achieve," Oliver said.

The most important goal now is making the community part of the team.

The Anchorage Park Foundation also received \$900,000 to expand its summer youth employment program.

Statewide, the Rasmuson Foundation awarded more than \$18 million in grants today.

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