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## **Etobicoke Guardian**

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by Cynthia Reason

The Thackeray Park Cricket grounds are \$5,000 closer to becoming a reality thanks to North Albion Collegiate Institute and Smithfield Middle School cricketers - the winners of the recent 2009 Double Wicket Student Challenge.

Young cricketers from eight local schools - North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI), Kipling, Thistleton, West Humber and Weston collegiate institutes in the senior play, and Smithfield, Dixon Grove and North Kipling junior middle schools in junior competition - took over the gym at Humber College's North Campus on Nov. 6 to compete for the honour of having a donation to the new grounds made in their school's name. The winning teams in each division got the opportunity to hand over a \$2,500 cheque on behalf of their school.

**Etobicoke North Councillor Suzan Hall**, one of the main proponents behind the \$450,000 project (first phase), said the city has secured the lands north of Steeles and Kipling avenues for an international standard cricket ground from the Toronto and Region Conservation Area (TRCA).

"There is a recognized need for dedicated cricket grounds in Toronto, especially in this community," she said, noting that the city has earmarked \$200,000 for the project as part of funding towards youth sport development in its 13 priority neighbourhoods. The city has also committed to maintaining the grounds and permitting their use once they're completed.

Dedicated for hardball cricket, the first phase of the development will include construction of the short outfield cricket grounds, featuring natural turf and a rolled, clay-based pitches, seating for more than 300 people, safety netting, a 23-spot parking lot and possibly non-permanent toilet facilities. The second phase, which will require additional funding, will entail bringing water, sewer and hydro onto the site, the construction of a clubhouse with washrooms and change rooms, an additional practice pitch and expanded seating.

The site, which is located on a clean landfill site on the Etobicoke-Vaughan border, was chosen for its easy accessibility by foot, bike, car and transit, Hall added.

"Through our fundraising efforts, we've been able to bring in more than \$70,500 - \$50,000 from the Police Service Board, \$10,000 from Ontario Cricket and \$10,500 from the local faith and business communities," she said.

"We're working hard at the city to get the first phase in to enable us to get the field in the ground in the spring. The enthusiasm (over the project) in the community has been mind-blowing, it's so important to them - that's why I'm giving my all to this project."

Fellow proponent Fred Morgan, president of the 50-member Elmbank Cricket Club, said the new grounds, once constructed, will be a real asset to bringing up Canada's future national players.

"This will be an international-style pitch, with natural turf and clay-pressed pitches," he said, noting that the local area has only four cricket pitches, none of them at the international standard.

"This way kids, who usually play inside on mats or carpet, will get the idea because when they play internationally, they play on natural turf. Cricket is one of the fastest growing sports in Canada, so everybody is excited."

Rabi Haidari and Sivajan Yogachandran, both 13-year-old eighth graders from North Kipling JMS, said they were delighted at the opportunity to play high quality cricket at the Double Wicket Student Challenge, while at the same time helping to raise money for a new pitch.

"This is fabulous and pretty fun, too. I like that (sponsors) Scotiabank and Black Diamond are putting it on for us," Rabi said shortly before the Cougar Cubs team he co-captains were edged out 20-19 by Smithfield in the junior finals. "It's an honour that everyone is taking the time to have this opportunity for us."

For more information or to donate, go to [www.torontoparksandtrees.org/cricket.htm](http://www.torontoparksandtrees.org/cricket.htm)