



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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MWRD biosolids compost help energize Ford Heights field of dreams



Former Cub pitcher Jason Hammel, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos and Ford Heights baseball players, coaches and residents unveil the new Excell Walker Field.

A baseball diamond requires clay, sand, silt, soil and grass, and at a new field in Ford Heights, IL, there is also a secret ingredient supplied by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) that assures players have a fertile field of dreams for years to come. The MWRD collaborated with Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart's office, the Ford Heights Park District, the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, Cubs Charities, James McHugh Construction, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other partners to deliver a state-of-the-art baseball field named Excell Walker Field.

The MWRD provided 110 tons of Class A exceptional quality (EQ) biosolids compost, a product of the water treatment process that supplies organic matter and improves soil structure and porosity to allow plants to more effectively utilize nutrients. The compost can be used as a soil amendment or conditioner for establishing turf grass or for mixing into custom topsoil blends. Since legislation was enacted in 2015 recognizing the environmental benefit of reusing MWRD biosolids locally, the product has grown in popularity; it was successfully used at golf courses and athletic fields at both public parks and schools in the Chicago area, including Maggie Daley Park and the 606 Trail.

"We are happy to support this beautiful project that gives Ford Heights' baseball players an attractive place to play and the entire community a central meeting place," said MWRD President



Clark the Cubs mascot helped celebrate the grand opening of a new baseball diamond in Ford Heights, where the grass is growing a little faster this year thanks to contributions from the MWRD. The Cook County Sheriff's Office coordinated efforts to turn an abandoned field into a field of dreams.

Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Thank you to Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart for coordinating this dynamic project and for offering us the opportunity to come to the aid of Ford Heights by returning these recovered resources that benefit the environment of the Cook County communities we serve."

The field became an initiative of Sheriff Dart after hearing the story of Ford Heights Park District President and baseball coach George "Kirby" Green and local baseball players. Residents of the impoverished south suburb first formed a youth team in 2014, but the team had to travel to neighboring, wealthier suburbs to play, which hampered local involvement and increased the cost for participation. The Cook County Sheriff's Office, which serves as the village's local police department, has sought to improve services and opportunities for residents.

"Prior to this field, these kids had to travel miles away to play baseball. Thanks to everyone who came together and put in more than a year and a half of work, the children of Ford Heights now have a field of their own and this community, that has seen so much hardship, has a symbol of hope that it deserves," said Sheriff Dart. The Cook County Sheriff's office reached out to the MWRD and other partners. Cubs Charities Diamond project granted \$47,000 and the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a joint initiative (*continued*)

MWRD biosolids compost help energize Ford Heights (continued)



Local baseball players have an attractive place to play ball thanks to the Cook County Sheriff's Office and numerous partners.

between Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association granted \$153,000 and former Cubs pitcher Jason Hammel, now with the Kansas City Royals, pitched in \$11,000 he won in charity contests and came out to celebrate at the ribbon cutting.

From what was once was a team of 10 players traveling without a home field in 2014 is now a league of five teams consisting of 55 baseball 11- and 12-year-old players who now patrol a pristine regulation-sized youth baseball field. The MWRD was happy to make that a reality.

"We welcome similar types of projects that can provide benefits for the community," said MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele. "By returning these valuable recovered resources to Cook County communities we are saving significant transportation costs and improving our environment with a sustainable product that was formerly trucked great distances to farms and landfills."

The compost is produced in windrows that are maintained at a temperature of at least 131-degrees for a minimum of 15 days and are turned five times during the period as required in USEPA protocol. The active composting period is followed by four months of curing after which the product is screened through a half-inch screen to remove large pieces of woods chips and tested as required. To meet the compost ratio of 3:1 woodchips to biosolids, the MWRD has partnered with the city of Chicago to co-composting woodchips from the city's routine tree trimming program and woodchips collected from ash trees lost due to the emerald ash-borer devastation.



Joseph Ryan, director of the Office of Public Policy for the Cook County Sheriff's Office, met with MWRD Managing Civil Engineer Ahmad Laban to watch as 127 tons of MWRD compost was delivered. The Sheriff's Office coordinated the construction of the field by bringing together a cadre of interested parties and donors.

Up from the ground grows a baseball diamond thanks in part to a compost product.

After collecting and treating the Chicago region's unwanted matter that has been poured down the drain, flushed down the toilet, or washed into storm drains, the MWRD has embraced a new way of looking at sewage: not as a waste material to be disposed of but as a collection of resources to be recovered and reused.

To support the MWRD's Strategic Business Plan goal of recovering resources, the MWRD is producing compost at two locations: the Harlem Avenue Solids Management Area (HASMA) in the north and the Calumet Avenue Solids Management Area (CALSMA) in the south. Currently, the MWRD is selling and distributing compost to private entities but the product and delivery are free to villages, park districts, and non-profit organizations and are available to private entities for \$10 per yard by pickup only. The MWRD is working on a pilot project to bag smaller amounts for potential sale to customers in the marketplace.

"We greatly appreciate the MWRD helping with this project," said Joseph Ryan. "The biosolids compost is a great addition to an area that had previously been an unusable plot of land."

The MWRD sells the compost to private or for-profit users in bulk at \$10 per cubic yard. To place an order or learn more, visit www.mwrd.org or email biosolids@mwrd.org.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrd.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for used water treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.