

## Torii Hunter drops in to dedicate a youth field he helped build

The Orange County Register

September 12, 2008

Eric Neff

Hunter quietly donated \$50,000 to the Placentia project in June.

Entering to children's chants – "Torii! Torii!" – Angel centerfielder Torii Hunter helped dedicate on Friday a youth softball field that is named after him.

In a ceremony attended by team owner Arte Moreno, general manager Tony Reagins, former Angel Doug DeCinces, two sixth-grade classes from Rose Drive Elementary School, just about every Placentia public official and a lot of television media, Hunter told the crowd he never had a field this nice during his youth.

The project, named Torii Hunter Field and at Kraemer Memorial Park, was organized by the charity Magical Builders in conjunction with the Boys & Girls Club of Brea, Placentia and Yorba Linda.

Hunter quietly donated \$50,000 to the \$500,000 project in June; the Angel team also kicked in \$50,000. Hunter's donation did not become public until following the City Council's decision to name the field after him in late July.

The sixth graders had their picture taken as a group with Hunter, and the children all received pre-autographed hats.

"It was surprising that (when) he grew up he was in a gang-related neighborhood, and how he made it was an inspiration," said sixth grader Izabella Garcia. "Some kids, having seen him make it – they know that they can keep chasing their dreams."

For Nathan Chappell, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club, the project was the culmination of a long effort to get Placentia its first softball field, in an area that is known for gang activity.

"It's a really rewarding experience for us to finally be here," he said. "It's really been about two years from planning to completing (it), so we're excited to give this to the community. I think any kid that plays here is going to feel like an all star."

### TORII HUNTER TALKS

Q. Why put a field in Placentia?

A. I know Placentia needed a field and a place to play baseball. I love that; I want kids to play baseball. That's what I do. I try and go out and help kids who want to play baseball and don't have a place to play.



**HONORARY LIFETIME MEMBERS:**  
Nathan Chappell gives Magical Builders founders John, left, and Christy Frank a lifetime membership to the Boys & Girls Clubs. According to Chappell, there have been only four or five of the honors given in the organization's history.

Q. What in your opinion does baseball add to a community, particularly a low-income one?

A. It kept me out of trouble. It kept me busy. Baseball is one of the only sports in the summertime that you really play. That's when you have all your time to do anything you want. There's no school, anything. So baseball kept me away from the streets and from not having anything to do in the summer. ... If you're going to school and you're playing basketball, you don't have no time to get yourself in trouble.

Q. The park the field's going in, Kraemer Park, is known as a gang hang out. What's your reaction to that?

A. It kind of changes the scene. When they've got games and different things like that – they look at this nice field – they don't want to destroy it. They really don't. But now that's something nice for kids and it's something positive that weeds out the negative. That's why you want to do that. You want to put in something new, and put a new face on it.

Q. What are your favorite types of community-service projects to support?

A. You've got to find what's close to your heart. If somebody comes to you and says, "Hey, I want you to do this charity for wheelchairs," that's not in my heart, so I wouldn't do that. Everything's positive, but every charity is not for you. That's somebody else's heart. My heart is with youth, kids with problems. Kids who have abusive parents or drugs in their family.

Q. You had barely even relocated to the West Coast when you agreed to support the project. Where did the connection happen?

A. One of my marketing guys came to me and this lady had called him and said, "Hey, there's this area called Placentia. There's a lot of gang violence, a lot of different things like that." ... And I'm like, man, a baseball field, that'll help. I ain't saying it's gonna solve the problems or anything like that. But it could help. You could get those kids in Las Plas (a local gang), and they might play baseball. Now they've found an interest in something and might stay away from all that. If they're hanging out with Las Plas the whole time, they're going to get in trouble. If you crimp into that time gradually, and get kids to play baseball or softball or whatever it may be, you can kind of get them away.

Q. Do you see any irony in the fact that you're dedicating a field for kids in the same week you got in a brawl with another player and swam in booze to celebrate the A.L. West title?

A. That's kind of weird. I try to be positive for the youth and different things like that, but when you're competitive on the field, a lot of things spark. ... It's been a heck of a week – winning the Western Division; I was swimming in booze, which was a good thing. And also we have the field dedication. So that's pretty good.



TORII'S SPEAKS: The Angels' Torii Hunter speaks to the crowd at the dedication.