

## Indians' new spring-training facility was built by Moores' company

By Tom Krasovic

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*Here is the entrance to Goodyear Park, the spring training home of the Cleveland Indians, in Goodyear, Ariz.*

GOODYEAR, Ariz. – The Padres and Indians played a Cactus League game Friday on land that not long ago was a cotton field amid scrub brush some 20 miles west of Phoenix.

For Padres owner John Moores, the baseball complex emerging in this desert town represents his business vision becoming reality, with a huge assist from Erik Judson, a former UCSD shortstop and San Diego State graduate student.

JMI Sports, a company Moores created in 2006 and entrusted to Judson, built Goodyear Ballpark and the nearby training and office site for the Indians. Next year the \$110 million development on a 240-acre parcel also will house Cleveland's Ohio baseball brethren, the Cincinnati Reds.

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Goodyear Ballpark opened last week. Its true beginning, though, dates to the Padres' lengthy development of Petco Park, plus the commercial growth that surrounded Petco.

"John said, 'Our Petco Park experience was just too valuable to keep on the shelf – we should take this experience to other communities,'" said Judson, a former Padres vice president.

Goodyear represents, at most, a pit stop to many drivers who zoom across the desert, toward either Phoenix or San Diego on Interstate 10.

To Judson, the fast-growing suburban city represented an opportunity to launch JMI Sports.

Phoenix was spreading west, gobbling up open land. Goodyear, recently named Forbes magazine's fourth-fastest growing suburban city, expected to grow from its present 58,000 population to about 400,000 over the next 20 years, Judson said.

Judson learned from a developer that a 240-acre parcel might be available near Goodyear's center.

He already knew that Greater Phoenix was becoming more popular with major league clubs looking for a new spring-training home.

Glendale lured two clubs favored by Goodyear officials, the Dodgers and White Sox. But Goodyear officials effectively recruited the Indians and Reds. The Indians, who spent the previous 16 years in Winter Haven, Fla., said JMI Sports, making good on Judson's sales pitch to them, supplied all the new-age bells and whistles for year-round training and development of players.

"Where we were, we were at a competitive disadvantage," Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro said. "This gives us a competitive advantage, and now it's up to us to make it work for us to take advantage of it."

Bidding for the Goodyear project, Judson, 41, touted his education as Padres vice president of development for Petco.

In the mid-1990s, when the Padres planned to move their spring-training site from Yuma to Peoria, they turned down an offer to buy land near the proposed Peoria complex. As it turned out, that land was a bargain.

Judson didn't make that same mistake. He also thought bigger in terms of development.

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“Rather than just plop this into the middle of a field,” he said Friday outside of Goodyear Ballpark, “we wanted to be part of an integrated master plan, which is what we learned greatly in San Diego.”

For now, Goodyear Ballpark and the Indians' complex is surrounded mostly by barren land. On hold is much of the planned development of restaurants, shops and hotels, owing to the recession and a dispute between the land owner and developer.

Judson also sought to distinguish Goodyear Ballpark architecturally from Peoria Stadium and several other Cactus League venues.

“Often there is just stucco buildings – put in some seats and wrap a berm out there and that's it,” he said. “We wanted to take a big-league approach to developing a Cactus League facility.”

Distinctive features at Goodyear Ballpark include a street-level, massive concourse that affords open sightlines above a bowl of some 8,000, dark-green seats and the field below; a ballpark exterior of dark brown paneling – heat-resistant fake wood from Spain, actually – and shades of silver, gray and clear glass.

“We saw that great architects in Arizona were using raw materials with wood and concrete and core tin and galvanized materials,” said Judson, who enlisted HOK Sport of Kansas City, Mo., the architectural firm that designed Petco and Camden Yards in Baltimore, among other ballparks.

A Goodyear official said the project met budget and time projections.

“Erik provided the vision for a ballpark like no other,” said Brian Dalke, the city's deputy city manager. “I am very impressed with the work they did on this project. They really managed the budget and coordinated the whole effort and did an excellent job.”

JMI Sports also won a \$65 million bid to build a city hall and library for Goodyear by 2011 and is building a \$250 million basketball arena at the University of Oregon.