

BASEBALL: 'We just want to do what is best for the kids' *Continued from page A1*

Shane Diarmit, the former Cal Ripken president, who will now be serving as the baseball director for the organization. "It makes us the biggest league in Keizer."

Former McNary Youth Baseball vice president Michael Bays will be the president of Keizer Baseball and Softball.

"We just want to do what is best for the kids," he said. "The Little League program has kind of been floundering over the last few years, and we want to make it great again. We want to rebuild it back to what it used to be."

The partnership is significant because it will allow youth players in Keizer Baseball and Softball to play both Little League and Cal Ripken for the first time.

The majority of Cal Ripken games come via weekend tournaments, while Little League plays most of their regular season contests during the week. This partnership will allow the organization's more competitive players to compete in Cal Ripken tournaments during the weekend, but still play for their Little League teams during the week. Players also have the option to play under just Little League or Cal Ripken, with Little League serving as more of a recreation league.

Because of Little League's stringent rules regarding tournaments, Diarmit believes that this partnership will allow more kids to play in more games.

"I always said from day one, before we even started Cal Ripken, if Little League just allowed full-blown tournaments, we would have never started Cal Ripken," Diarmit said. "That is where Cal Ripken can step in, because Little League hasn't had the ability to run those tournaments, so that marriage works out real well."

Keizer Cal Ripken, which was started by former Keizer Little League president Brad Arnsmeier, was created just last year. In the spring, Keizer Cal Ripken started a



Keizer Little League players make common appearances at Volcanoes Stadium.

FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

trial partnership with Keizer Little League to provide assistance with the concession stands and field maintenance.

"We went to Little League and said we know you need help in concessions and running the fields and we would love to be that organization you can lean on," Diarmit said. "It worked out really well. There were no issues at all, everyone was really happy. So we wanted to make it official," Diarmit said.

According to Diarmit, one of the other benefits of the partnership was that the two groups were able to better coordinate field time at KLL Park.

"Being able to book those fields was a lot easier because we were able to work together. There was a lot more flexibility because we knew that partnerships was there, where in the past, that flexibility hasn't necessarily been there," Diarmit said.

"You had three leagues fighting for those field slots. With us combining, it takes one-third of that problem away.

Instead of fighting with each other, we can work together and coordinate to do this," Bays added.

During the season, Cal Ripken and Little League also collaborated with McNary Youth Baseball to do inter-league play for each organization's tee-ball and coach pitch teams.

"There were a lot of people that were against merging, but this showed that we can work together," Bays said.

Although the collaboration was successful at the lower levels, McNary Youth Baseball — which plays under a Junior Baseball of Oregon (JBO) model — is not currently planning on joining forces with Keizer Baseball and Softball. The McNary Youth Baseball board of directors met on Thursday, Oct. 7 and released a joint statement in regards to the partnership between Cal Ripken and Little League.

"The key difference to the JBO model we support, is that it provides a competitive atmosphere for beginners and advanced players at each age level. Every kid can be a starter, and rather than only advanced groups or players going to tournaments and end of year championships, even our newest softball and baseball players experience that. We don't negotiate on that," the statement said — read full statement in sidebar (left).

As the former McNary Youth Baseball vice president, Bays says the goal is to someday join forces with the organization.

"We are all about them joining when they are ready to or if they want to, but we're not trying to force anything on them," Bays said. "Right now, we are basically two charters under one organization. Maybe one day we will have three charters under one organization."

Both Bays and Diarmit are hoping that the new program will bring more stability to the Keizer youth baseball and softball scene.

"With both our programs supported by national organizations we can provide our players with multiple opportunities to play in state, regional and national tournaments with the hopes of putting Keizer Baseball and Softball back on the map," Diarmit said. "We want to thank everyone for their support and we can wait to see all of our players on the field soon."

McNary Youth Baseball statement on new league

Competition has always been healthy for our players, and it's why we volunteer to create competitive programs for all our players. There are always different philosophies for what works best to reach the most kids with diverse skills, ages, and experience. Because of that, there will always be new programs that come along based on a new set of goals. KYSA/MYB's baseball and softball programs have endured for four-plus decades to serve thousands of players because the model makes sense. We strive to provide opportunities for personal growth and development of youth athletes while also reinforcing positive influences, self-confidence and self-esteem. We serve the broadest group of players and skill sets. Thanks in a large part to this, we've never run out of parents and players to serve.

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As we learn what others seek to build this time, we are eager to see if our business models are similar or if the Keizer community is best served with two options to meet their different needs. However, we will be faithful to our core values as an organization. Historically, we've been satisfied to maintain the model, but remain open to working with any program that shares our core values.

- McNary Youth Baseball Board

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