

Sahlen Field gets MAJOR LEAGUE TREATMENT

BY CINDY CHAN



The newly renovated Sahlen Field has been a homerun for athletes, spectators and the overall community.

Built in 1987, Sahlen Field is a triple-A ballpark in Buffalo, home of the Buffalo Bisons baseball team, but it has also been the temporary home for the Toronto Blue Jays during the COVID-19 pandemic. The field underwent renovations

from March 8, 2021 to May 27, 2021 – a total of 70 days' work with the exception of weekends and holidays. The quick turnover was a highlight of the project for all involved, considering the pandemic. Upgrades included renovations to the interior clubhouse, construction of a new batting building and construction of a new two-tiered bullpen in the outfield, as well as upgrades to the outfield wall and lighting

of the field to Major League Baseball standards, according to Martin Knauss, project group leader at Lehigh Construction Group, Inc.

"As a triple-A ball field, that wasn't going to work for a Major League Baseball team," Harold Knittel, project manager at Lehigh Construction Group, Inc., says. "There were considerable renovations made to the clubhouse. It was pretty much an overhaul with a lot of finishes, mechanical work, electrical work and plumbing work to get it to meet Major League standards."

"We demolished and renovated all the interior clubhouse spaces, bathrooms, locker rooms, training rooms and hydrotherapy rooms," Marc Irace, on-site project manager at Lehigh Construction Group, Inc., says.

The project also had a unique partnership with BaAM Productions. Nathalie Burri, project director, says the company focuses on the marriage between creative and construction.

"Temporary construction for sport is what we specialize in. There are other special events we work on as well, but it's really that kind of industry where we've been able to be successful," Burri says. "We've made a name for ourselves in the sporting industry for having the ability to take the non-traditional site and build it into something necessary for professional sports like Major League Baseball."

When the Toronto Blue Jays had to move to Sahlen Field in 2020, they called BaAM Productions under the recommendation from Major League


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Baseball to see if they could transform the facilities at Sahlen Field.

"I don't think anyone realized how long COVID would last, so it was a temporary solution to get them through the end of their season in 2020," Burri says. "When things were not looking good going into the 2021 planning season, the Blue Jays started to quickly realize they might not be able to play in Canada and might have to find a tem-

porary home to host their season."

As a result, the Blue Jays reached out to BaAM again based on their stellar work in 2020. BaAM then created a more long-term site at Sahlen Field.

"The reason they called us again was they realized we were able to project manage from a construction perspective. We had already built and shown them what we can do from a temporary perspective," Burri says. BaAM's scope

of work included project management and finding a local general contractor to take on the permanent building improvements. "We were tasked with building a new batting cage facility, as well as home and visiting bullpen facilities. On top of that, we were hired on to build out a visiting team compound."

Because of the complexity of the project, there were two architects involved. Scheid Architectural was the architect of record for the clubhouse portion of the project, while sports architecture firm Populous handled the exterior.

"We utilized our in-house infrared scanning technology in conjunction with the information and scope provided by Populous. We were able to put together an easy-to-follow pamphlet of permit and construction drawings," Jim Gannon of Scheid Architectural says.

Encorus Group Engineering, P.C. provided the special inspections and testing on the project, according to Jeremy Lake, civil laboratory manager. Lake says when the contractor excavated to install the foundations, his team inspected the bearing grade of the soil that will be directly beneath the concrete footing, using a static cone penetrometer.

"Once the subgrade was approved, the contractor began installing formwork and reinforcing steel for the foundations," Lake adds. "We measured the formwork and reinforcing steel to make sure they are installed as per the approved drawings and specifications for the project." Encorus Group also provided concrete, soils and structural steel inspections to verify everything was installed properly as per the approved drawings and specifications.

Ryan Glenn, vice president of Brawdy Construction, says his team performed the earthwork for the project, which



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was predominantly excavation, backfill, concrete foundations, concrete floor slabs and masonry.

"We were one of the first ones in, starting our masonry scope of work predominantly inside the locker rooms on March 20," Glenn says. "Then we did the larger scope of work, including earthwork and concrete on March 31. We finished on May 13, 2021."

Alan Heerd, vice president of Murray

Roofing, says his team installed a Firestone Building Products 60-mil black EPDM adhered roof system (5,500 square feet) with two layers of 2.6-inch thick polyisocyanurate insulation at the batting cages, which also comes with a 20-year manufacturer's warranty.

Empire Building Diagnostics performed demolition of the maintenance and storage building, interior demolition of the locker and clubhouse fa-

cilities and concrete cutting of the floor slab to create plumbing and electrical trenches, says Michael Young, vice president.

"Our scope of work included upgrades to the heating and air conditioning systems for the home locker room, weight room and players' lounge," Craig Wittmann, account executive for John W. Danforth Company, says. "We also did the new heating and air conditioning for the batting cages and a couple of toilet rooms in the bullpen area."

Wittmann says last year they provided temporary heating and cooling rental units, but this year they were asked to design and install permanent systems.

"It gave the Blue Jays the opportunity to feel like they were in a Major League stadium, even though it was in a smaller city," Wittmann says. The other subcontractors on the project included Capital Fence, ALP Steel Corp., Empire Erectors, Mader Construction, N. Choops, J&R Specialties, Davis-Ulmer Sprinkler Company, Ferguson Electric, MLP Plumbing & Mechanical and Heritage Contract Flooring.

Sahlen Field has done more than provide a place for the Toronto Blue Jays to play. After a year of living in fear of COVID-19, Buffalo residents have embraced having a Major League Baseball team like the Toronto Blue Jays in the city.

From a business standpoint, the project has been good for the economy in Buffalo with Blue Jays, visiting teams and out-of-town baseball fans spending money on restaurants and hotel stays.

"That was the big financial impact," Doug Eberhardt, director of marketing for Lehigh Construction Group, Inc., says. "The real feel-good story is that I think people wanted to get out and do normal things, and baseball is a big part of that. Sahlen Field represented that to the community." ♦

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