

Site Search:

[Extended Search](#)

Week of
January 12-18, 2006



- home
- news
- op-ed
- lifestyles
- food
- sports
- police report
- youth & schools
- calendar
- socials & obituaries
- classifieds
- real estate
- place an ad
- menu guide
- medical guide
- archives
- contact us

South Philly **review**
visit our online store!

 **photo gallery**

missed your paper?



review newspapers
2005 COMMUNITY **GUIDE**

Extreme home-field makeover

The school district will begin major renovations to the athletic site at 12th and Bigler next year. The public will have limited access to the new facility.

By [Bill Gelman](#)
December 2, 2004

Rusty fences, creaky bleachers and lumpy playing surfaces have long characterized the old Bok-Southern athletic fields at 12th and Bigler streets.



A lack of adequate lighting and supportive track lanes has further contributed to the facility's status as a neighborhood eyesore in recent years.

Now, after a year of rounding up funding partners and listening to residents' concerns, the School District of Philadelphia is poised to transform the fields from out-of-date to state-of-the-art.

The district will start taking bids for the \$6-million plan to overhaul the fields in January. Work is likely to begin in early June and will last up to a year and a half.

When the work is finished, the football fields -- which will be reconfigured to face north and south, as opposed to east and west as they do now -- will be covered in "soft, giving" NexTurf, said Marjorie Wuestner, executive director of the school district's Office of Health, Safety, Physical Education and Sports Administration.

The athlete-friendly playing surface also will cover new baseball, softball, soccer and field-hockey fields.

To complete the facility's conversion into a designated "super site," the district will install an eight-lane all-weather track and new stands, locker rooms, a press box and a new irrigation system.

"Out of the four super sites we have planned, this one is going to be the most expensive," Wuestner said.

Facilities in Northeast Philadelphia, Germantown and at Simon Gratz High School also were targeted for rehabilitation.

"Our plan was to turn these facilities into something wonderful, both for the kids and for the communities," Wuestner said.

Feedback on the Northeast site -- the first to be completed -- has been positive and plentiful, the official added.

"When people see what we've done, it will take their breath away," Wuestner said.

But residents near the Bok-Southern fields weren't initially enamored of the renovation plans.

Ads by Google

Buck's County PA Homes

Buck's County
Pennsylvania Homes
Every New Listing
Every Two Hours
bucks-county-fine-homes.com

NT Callaway Real Estate

New Hope, Solebury,
Bucks County all listings. A Sotheby's Affiliate
www.NTCallaway.com

After the district held a preliminary public meeting in January, neighbors worried that the project would add to parking headaches and could attract swarms of students from all over the city, said Tony Greco, president of the South Philadelphia Communities Civic Association.

However, the school district has done a good job of listening to neighbors' concerns and adapting its plans accordingly, Greco said.

"Originally, there was going to be an entrance directly across from Stella Maris, but they agreed to eliminate it after a request," the civic leader said of the church at 2910 S. 10th St. "They're also putting in two parking lots, so there won't be extra cars on the street for bigger events."

More meetings are scheduled for after the holidays, Greco said.

Wuestner acknowledged that good community relations were essential to getting the project off the ground.

"It's a smaller area, and we certainly understand that the people who live there are concerned about more cars and more traffic," she said. "However, I think it's going to fit nicely in their community."

Neighborhood leaders are apparently confident enough in the benefits of the facility to invest in its security -- a move also expected to help residents.

After a request from Greco's civic association, the **Sports Complex Special Services District** contributed \$286,000 in financial assistance that will be used to install wrought-iron fences.

"Without our assistance here, the existing rusted and damaged cyclone fencing would probably remain and offer no realistic guard against trespassers," said Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the district. "The SCSSD's funding of estate fencing will hopefully enhance the facility's security and help beautify the area for adjacent residents."

State Sen. Vince Fumo also helped the civic association land a \$50,000 grant so the group can build offices on the super site. Members hope their presence will ward off vandals and drug dealers.

Greco said he doesn't want to see the fields get destroyed after the school district puts millions of dollars into them, which is why the facility will largely be closed to the public after its makeover is finished.

"We're going to have to be very careful about how it's used," he said. "We'll work with the neighbors to create some kind of schedule so that they can use the track, but it's important people realize this is an athletic field, not a recreation park."

Greco said the civic association, which will be entrusted with keys to the locked athletic fields, would make exceptions if the community wanted to organize a special event, but cautioned residents shouldn't count on picnics or pickup football games.

"If people are just looking for a place to hang out, there's Fairmount Park and The Lakes," he said. "Otherwise, they'd need to apply for a permit through the school board to use the new fields."

School district spokesperson Vincent Thompson acknowledged that some residents might be disappointed that the field won't always be open for public use, but stressed the positives.

"On the one hand, for the schools that will use the field regularly -- Bok, Southern, Neumann-Goretti and Stella Maris -- it's going to be an amazing experience," he said. "And the residents who live near the field will benefit by having something so state-of-the-art in their neighborhood."

 **E-mail this article to a friend**