

A labor of love

Former MAC hoops standout breathes new life into family-friendly hoops facility

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For true basketball players, the game never really leaves you.

Even when you're away from it; even when years have gone by, basketball always finds you again.

For former Macomb Area Conference (Romeo High) standout Steve Benard, the game found him again in the summer of 2003.

"I was out of it for more than 10 years," Benard explained. "Then this opportunity came along, and I took it. I have to admit, it's really rejuvenated my love for the game."

The opportunity that tapped the former Rochester College player on the shoulder came in the form of a Roseville facility known as Basketball City.

"The place was in really bad shape when I took it over," Benard explained. "The former owner was evicted, and he took the backboards and things like that. The locker rooms were terrible. The whole place was in miserable condition."

Somehow, though, Benard saw past the broken boards, dusty surfaces and dilapidated condition of the place. He pictured a vibrant facility where kids and adults could come and play the game he loves.

"I wanted a place where people of all ages could come and play without worrying about thugs and things like that," he said. "I wanted this place to be a family facility."

After months of hard work, Benard has exactly what he'd hoped for — a family-oriented basketball complex complete with six 3-on-3 courts, one full court, renovated locker rooms, a snack bar, new backboards and baskets, a birthday party room and a staff that loves the game as much as he does.

"This place has really come a long way since August of 2003," the current Grosse Pointe Woods resident admitted. "I like to work fast, though. That's the kind of person I am."

The speed at which Benard renovated the 13-year-old facility was impressive to patrons who remember the dark times at Basketball City.

"I wouldn't go," 33-year-old Eastpointe resident Sheldon Smith said. "I loved the game, and I love to play it, but this wasn't the place for a guy my age who just wanted to play some pickup games to go. It was in bad shape, and it was overrun with not-so-friendly younger guys. It's totally different now. It's a great place. I even bring my nephews here with me."

Benard is proud of the fact that there's something for everyone at Basketball City.

"We've got a great mix of customers," the owner said. "People of all ages and all skill levels can really enjoy the place. Every court is supervised so nothing can happen, and I don't tolerate just coming up here to hang out. This is a basketball facility, and people come here to play basketball."

Along with open gyms, which run every day from 9 a.m. to midnight, Basketball City has tiered leagues for adult men and women of all ages and ability; Friday night youth tournaments complete with trophies; Saturday morning walk-in clinics for kids; and court rentals and youth camps throughout the year.

"I think it's really a cool place," 10-year-old Dugan Smolinski said while chomping on a slice of pizza from the snack bar. "I think I'm going to get really good because I can come here and play."

Benard said he went the extra mile to make certain his facility has everything basketball players could hope for because he loves the game so much and has first-hand knowledge of what other basketball junkies want from a facility.

"I really think my experience with the game helps in this respect," he said. "I know what players want and what they don't want because I'm a basketball player. I've tried to fill this place with things basketball players want."

It shows.

"Years ago, I never would've seen myself owning something like this place," he said. "Now, I really love it."

This passion, this commitment Benard has made to the community has not only revitalized this Macomb County facility, it's also given countless others a family-friendly place to express their love for the game of basketball.

Basketball City is located at 16400 Eastland in Roseville.

For more information on camps, clinics, court rentals and leagues at Basketball City, please call (586) 778-1120. Or you can log on to www.basketballcitydetroit.com

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