EAST CHICAGO life

YOUR LOCAL SOURCE FOR EAST CHICAGO NEWS AND EVENTS

BLOCK STADIUM





WELCOME TO EAST CHICAGO'S FIELD OF DREAMS

It's official East Chicago! This city is back in the business of baseball!

We were fortunate: The clouds parted just in time to welcome members of the family that built Block Stadium and honor them with the Key to the City. It was a perfect time for residents to take a tour and learn a little more about what they can expect after we announce the teams that will call the East Chicago field home.

We are anticipating a full season of play in 2023 when the legacy of the partnership between the Block family and East Chicago will begin its next chapter.

We are eagerly anticipating the draw this world-class stadium will have. It might have been the pandemic or just a changing society that has prompted local residents to look for family time and entertainment closer to home.

The promise of the new Block Stadium has yet to be realized. It will unfold as our children grow in its shadow. This generation – and those that follow – will watch talented baseball players pitch and field balls. They may see the next Satchel Paige get their start here like Kenny Lofton did. They can turn their dreams of playing at Block Field into a reality.

Our kids were the inspiration for this project. We met every challenge with them in mind. I challenge them to see the possibilities of a dream.

ANTHONY COPELAND
Mayor City of East Chicago









HOME RUN FOR EAST CHICAGO

When Mayor Anthony Copeland and his development team surveyed Block Stadium in 2017, it became immediately clear: on this project there would be no middle ground. “Fixing what was wrong would be expensive but I knew we couldn’t allow a wrecking ball to be the final chapter,” Copeland said. New dugouts and bullpens were followed by a new field, irrigation system, scoreboard, press box, covered seating, an impressive entry and batting cages to create the complete package. “This is here for the community,” Copeland announced to the crowd. “Our children are going to be able to attend a baseball game right here in the city. I hope many will play baseball on this beautiful field.” [Steve Segura photos]

BLOCK STADIUM

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East Chicago was born

The City of East Chicago was incorporated in **1893**, the same year as the great Columbian Exhibition on the south side of Chicago. Born of railroad and steel, East Chicago was one of Northwest Indiana's first truly industrial cities designed to meet the needs of workers and industry.

City's first open-hearth mill

The Block family led Inland Steel's recovery and, in **1901**, Inland Steel pledged to raise more than $1 million to build an open-hearth mill in East Chicago.



Block Stadium dedication

Block Stadium was dedicated on Memorial Day 1942 and financed by the Block family (owners of the Inland Steel Company) to boost employee morale.

Block Avenue

There are just 11 properties on this block-long residential street that was constructed in the mid 1960s.

Joseph L. Block Middle School

Built on land donated by the family, Joseph Block spoke at the dedication in 1968 and presented a steel sculpture titled "Inner Space."



East Chicago Conquistadors

The stadium first served a professional team in 1995 when the independent league East Chicago Conquistadors called it home, for their first and only season. The team's average per game attendance was 94 fans per game.

Baseball Complex

In 2002, East Chicago native and Chicago White Sox great Kenny Lofton donated $125,000 to construct new ball fields. The Kenny Lofton Baseball Complex features one senior field, two little leagues field and one T-ball field.

1880 | 1890 | 1900 | 1910 | 1920 | 1930 | 1940 | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2020

Inland Steel was founded

Inland Steel was founded in **1893** through the purchase, by financier Philip Block, of a small failed Chicago Heights, Illinois steel mill, Chicago Steel Works.



L. E. BLOCK



P. D. BLOCK



E. J. BLOCK

BLOCK FAMILY'S LONG LEGACY IN EAST CHICAGO

When Mayor Anthony Copeland welcomed a packed house to the grand opening of Block Stadium, descendants of all three Block siblings were in attendance.

As a fourth-generation member of the family of Inland Steel founders, Mary Lu Roffe was thrilled to see what had become of the storied baseball field.

"We used to hear about events at Block Field when family members would gather. The stories centered on great games and lots of fun," the Winnetka native said. "I had heard before we arrived that the new Block Stadium was light years ahead of what my grandfather built to boost the morale of his employees, who were working feverishly to meet the demands of the U.S. military during World War II. "This stadium is spectacular — everything we had heard it would be — and more."

Whether it was the dedication of Block Junior High or memorializing the new wing at St. Catherine Hospital on land donated by the family, Roffe said East Chicago milestones that harken back to a century-long relationship between the Block family and the city are wonderful reminders of what has been achieved.

"These very special days bring the memories of what we heard as children back to life," she said. "I know my father, grandfather and great grandfather would be happy to see the partnership they forged more than a century ago is alive and well. I look forward to returning to this field to make new memories. Congratulations to Mayor Copeland and the residents of East Chicago."

Largest crowd

It was a baseball game for the ages; a match-up between a team of Twin City all-stars and the Great Lakes Naval Base Bluejackets. It was to be a slugfest right here at East Chicago's very own E. J. Block Athletic Field during the height of World War II. The allure of the game exploded when it was learned the Bluejackets team was comprised entirely of major league standouts, including Mickey Cochrane, who managed the Great Lakes team. Before joining the Navy, Cochrane had already become a legend as a catcher and manager of the Detroit Tigers. Additional bleachers were brought in to hold the 10,000 spectators that packed the stadium built to hold 3,500. The event drew the largest crowd ever to watch a baseball game at Block Stadium. Many describing it as the experience of a lifetime.



EAST CHICAGO GIANTS 1945 TEAM PHOTO

The Negro League and the East Chicago Giants

History details a phenomenal baseball classic when East Chicago Giants pitcher Satchel Paige struck out the first eight batters he faced. By the end of the ninth inning, the underdogs had beat the big-league "All-Stars" 13-4 in front of an overflow crowd of 4,000 at Block Stadium where Paige was pitching as part of The Negro American League. It was a time when most ballparks — major league, minor league and municipal — were segregated. Those who were lucky enough to watch the game in Northwest Indiana had the opportunity because East Chicago was ahead of most of the country when it came to segregation. In 1971, Leroy "Satchel" Paige was inducted into the Hall of Fame based on his MLB pitching record. Combined with his Negro League stats, it is believed he was the greatest pitcher in the history of the league.
[Photo provided]

Did you know?

It wasn't just entrepreneurs who developed baseball leagues in East Chicago. The popularity of the game helped Mexican neighborhoods assimilate with American culture in the 1930s and 1940s. Developed by local churches, the ball clubs help immigrants combat the isolation they felt in their new home towns. The popularity of those leagues, which drew an ever-growing number of spectators, led to improvements — like bleachers — at some of the ballfields, including El parquet Anahuac and Block Stadium. During the Depression, Block fared better than El parquet Anahuac, where its bleachers were chopped up and the field dug up to tap a coal deposit to heat homes.



$8 million renovation

Five phases, four years and $8 million after Block Stadium rehabilitation began, the ballfield, dugouts, batting cages, announcers box and stands are pristine, just waiting for spring training when baseball will once again be played at the vintage park. Parks and Recreation Department Director Vanessa Hernandez-Orange said excitement is growing to see baseball played again at the 80-year-old park – one of only 15 vintage baseball stadiums remaining in the country. "This is a beautiful facility that will welcome visitors from far and wide who want to see what watching baseball at a hometown field is like," Hernandez-Orange said. "We are getting more phone calls from baseball fans who have heard what we are doing and want to see it for themselves." [Steve Segura photo]

HOMEBUYER WORKSHOPS

Dream of owning a home? Learn more about buying or building in East Chicago through the Homebuyer Assistance Program at an upcoming workshop hosted by the East Chicago Department of Redevelopment.

When: July 9, August 13, September 17, October 8, November 12, December 10

Registration: Please call (219) 391-8513 to register.

SAVE THE DATES

The fun is back! Events are returning to the City of East Chicago! See you there!

INDEPENDENCE DAY FIREWORKS
Sunday, July 3

SALSA NIGHT IN THE PARK
Sunday, July 30

FUSIC FEST
Saturday and Sunday, August 6-7

KIELBASA FEST
Saturday, August 20

Info: For more information on these events and more, please visit eastchicago.com.

CALLING ALL VENDORS!

The City of East Chicago is looking for vendors and food trucks for upcoming events including Movie Nights in the Park, Rhythm & Soul Fest, Salsa in the Park, Fusic Fest, Kielbasa Fest, National Dog Day, Monarch Festival, 5K Mayor-A-Thon and so much more.

Info: For questions, more information or to register, please visit eastchicago.com or call (219) 391-8482.

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