

# Child's Play

A new athletic facility in Lansdowne hopes to teach kids leadership. And maybe something more.

David Sattler

**B**rothers Michael and Patrick Grace never forgot their Lansdowne roots. Though Patrick now lives on Governor Kent Terrace in Ellicott City, and Mike calls Rolling Farm Court in Catonsville home, both have fond memories of playing basketball at St. Clement's and roaming the streets of Lansdowne, Baltimore highlands and Arbutus as kids.

"So we had this idea," said Patrick, "a \$750,000 idea" to "impact

thousands of kids. We said, 'let's build our own gym.'"

Patrick, an executive with United Parcel Service, and Mike, an attorney, had the seed money to begin the venture. But as so often happens, the good ideas — a space for baseball, a game room, an after-school education program — kept coming, and by the time the "gym" opened in December at 2900 Hammonds Ferry Road, it was a \$2.5-million facility that was the

work of dozens of volunteers and donors.

The 22,000 sq. ft. facility includes two basketball courts that would be the envy of many high school and college teams, batting and pitching cages, including one with a real dirt mound, a game room, an education center equipped with donated computers, equipment to convert the basketball courts to volleyball courts, and space for younger children to learn the fundamentals of basketball on lower baskets.

"We decided it was wrong just to focus on our own kids," said Patrick. "Now we've created this monster."

"This monster" offers a little bit of everything: space for leagues, some organized by an organization the brothers helped found, Leadership Through Athletics, some organized by outsiders; free time everyday for neighborhood kids to use the gym (currently 3-5 p.m.), a free referee school for teenagers, food and clothing drives, the education center, sports clinics for children as young as four, birthday party rentals and programs that seem to pop up as fast as someone can think of them.

"It certainly," said Christian Metzger, the director of develop-

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