



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

A publication of Bowles Rice LLP

Summer 2019



Shawnee Sports Complex: Our Backyard “Sports Tourism” Destination

Ben Salango, County Commissioner
Kanawha County, West Virginia

In February 2017, Ben Salango was appointed to serve as a member of the Kanawha County Commission, a position he was reelected to in 2018. In this role, he works to promote the interests of and bring economic development to Kanawha County. He was a staunch advocate for the creation of the new Shawnee Sports Complex, which officially opened in July 2018. Also a practicing attorney, Salango founded the firm Preston & Salango, PLLC with attorney Brett Preston in 2006.

Many of us played sports growing up, often for our middle and high school teams. Traveling more than an hour or two to play a game, even an away game, was rare. Well, if you have kids (or grandkids) who play sports in 2019, you have undoubtedly noticed that times have changed in a big way. In the last two decades, youth athletics have transformed from a childhood pastime into one of the fastest growing businesses in the United States. In fact, the U.S. youth sports market – which entails everything from travel sports to private coaching and even iPhone apps that livestream games – is now a \$15.3 billion industry, according to WinterGreen Research, a private firm that tracks youth sports.

Fortunately for us, Kanawha County, West Virginia, is ideally situated to become a major player in the growing “sports tourism” market. Kanawha County is located within a one-day drive of two-thirds of the population of the United States, and is less than four hours from several cities, including Cincinnati, Columbus, Charlotte, Lexington, Louisville and Pittsburgh, to name a few.

In 2015, a National Association of Sports Commissions’ study identified Shawnee Park in Institute, West Virginia, as our area’s best



opportunity to develop a tournament site and travel destination for large youth athletic events. One visit to the park and it’s easy to see why – Shawnee is beautiful, with its 127 acres of oh-so-rare flat West Virginia real estate bordering the Kanawha River. Moreover, Shawnee is easily accessible, located along Interstate 64 and within a quick drive (or Uber ride) from hotels and shopping in Charleston, South Charleston, Dunbar and Cross Lanes.

Once the Kanawha County Commission made the decision to move forward with the redevelopment of Shawnee Park, we set a lofty





The Shawnee Sports Complex first opened in July 2018. It is one of the largest artificial turf and natural grass sports facilities in the eastern United States. The complex features six collegiate sized FieldTurf USA soccer and lacrosse fields, four collegiate size turf baseball/softball fields, newly renovated basketball courts, and nearly 40 additional acres of natural grass fields that can be used for a variety of sports.

goal: to build the premiere youth sports facility in West Virginia, a state-of-the-art complex that our local community could use and enjoy, but also a facility that would become a destination for travel sports and act as an economic driver for the entire Kanawha Valley. The Shawnee Sports Complex officially opened in July 2018, and by anyone’s measure, it has accomplished that goal and so much more.

In its first few months, Shawnee quickly became the home to more than 40 local high school, middle school and recreation league teams. That’s hundreds of players and spectators spending their evenings and weekends at the new facility.

But starting this summer, the Shawnee Sports Complex is set to truly realize its purpose as a travel sports destination by co-hosting two major tournaments in 2019: the U.S. Youth Soccer Eastern President’s Cup and the U.S. Youth Soccer Eastern Regional Championships. Combined, these two tournaments will

see over 400 teams compete at Shawnee and in Barboursville, adding up to thousands of players, families, coaches and staff that will be visiting Kanawha and Cabell Counties.

Not content to rest on our laurels, the Kanawha County Commission recently joined with Barboursville, U.S. Senator Joe Manchin and Mayor Amy Goodwin of Charleston to announce we were once again awarded the U.S. Youth Soccer Eastern Regional Championship as well as the President’s Cup for 2020. So, less than a year after opening, the Shawnee Sports Complex has secured four of the most well-recognized U.S. Youth Soccer tournaments in the eastern United States.

While landing these tournaments is good news for the Shawnee Sports Complex, it is great news for the Kanawha Valley’s hotels, restaurants and small businesses. Travel teams often bring the whole family in tote. That means sold-out hotels, packed restaurants and lots of traffic heading

to and from the local businesses, malls and the stores along Corridor G. In fact, the flurry of activity surrounding these tournaments is projected to provide a \$56 million boost to the local economy in 2019 and 2020! Any way you cut it, that’s a huge number, and it proves that by tapping into the “sports tourism” market, the Shawnee Sports Complex has become the regional economic driver that the Kanawha County Commission envisioned. ♪