

# CREATING A Miracle

## A Young Philanthropist Steps Up to the Plate

by Jamie Logan

Joseph Voynik was just twelve when he came up with an idea that would change his life—and the lives of others—for good. The day got off to a surreal start as Joseph and his father Eddie joined Pittsburgh Pirates fans in a stadium far from home. Joseph always had a passion for baseball, but on that day, his passion became something more when he witnessed an advertisement for the National Miracle League, an organization devoted to giving children of all abilities the chance to play baseball.

“I saw commercials for their Miracle League field and wanted to help with it, but I realized I couldn’t go there because of school and sports,” Joseph explained. He began to explore other avenues in hopes of making a difference closer to home.

“I decided to raise money to build a Miracle League baseball field in the Jackson Metro area for people from all over the state to come and enjoy,” Joseph said. “I pitched the idea to our Global Leadership Institute at Jackson Prep, and they got behind it.”

A consortium of staff and students pitched in to make Joseph’s dream a reality. Together, they created the Miracle Mile Walk/Run, a fundraiser for the cause. “Once people heard about the Miracle Mile Walk/Run and the cause, it began to catch on,” Joseph said. “In March 2014, over \$10,000 was raised by the students, faculty and leadership at Jackson Prep to be used as seed money for a Miracle League field.”

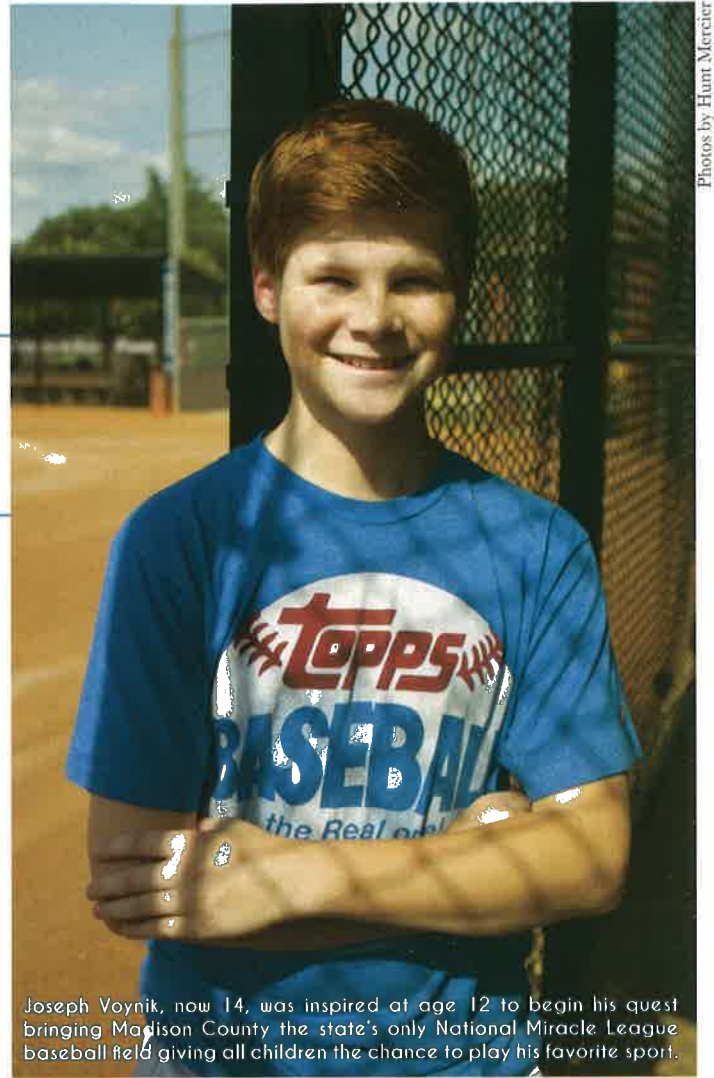
When Joseph and his parents presented their proposal to various cities around central Mississippi, one location stuck out above the others. The city of Ridgeland was selected as the leading candidate for the state’s first ever Miracle League field.

“I think they stand out in that their Parks and Rec department already offers so much for kids with special needs compared to other cities in the area. That really impressed me,” said Tammy Voynik, who serves as chairman for the newly created Miracle League of Central MS. “Joseph shared his story with them and his interest in bringing the field here. With high interests they said they may have a place for it at Hite Wolcott.”

The potential site, located on McClellan Drive, is part of a quad with three other baseball fields. “The nice thing about it is that it’s integrated with all of the other fields,” said Tammy. “That’s something Joseph liked.”

At the end of the day, Joseph wants special needs children to go home from the ball field with their brothers and sisters after a normal game day experience. “I just feel like people with special needs... they don’t really get everything we get,” he said. “My mom is in a wheel chair. She can’t do some of the things we can do.”

Ridgeland’s Challenger League is composed of six teams of kids with special needs who would benefit immediately. These teams, who



Joseph Voynik, now 14, was inspired at age 12 to begin his quest bringing Madison County the state’s only National Miracle League baseball field giving all children the chance to play his favorite sport.

Photos by Hunt-Mercier

currently play on dirt fields, are often rained out because the surfaces become too soft for wheelchairs and walkers. “With the special surface, even if it rains, you can get it ready to play,” Tammy explained.

The updated field will boast latex-free rubber cement turf requiring very little maintenance; however, the surface alone will cost roughly \$150,000. “What’s great about that location is that the infrastructure’s already there,” said Eddie Voynik. The family and their partners will save money since accessible bathrooms, lighting, and drainage are already covered. The location is the first priority.

“I think Ridgeland has really stepped to the plate, so to speak,” Eddie said. “We want to make sure that Joseph’s gift to whoever it goes to is properly utilized and isn’t just set aside.”

Above all, Joseph hopes to create relationships between volunteers and players that will change the lives of everyone who visits the field.

“Just because you’re young doesn’t mean you can’t make a difference,” said his mom. She, her husband, and Joseph’s younger sister are doing their best to make his dream come true.

Joseph, now fourteen, has visited fields from Louisiana to Georgia to gain a better understanding of the National Miracle League.

He has done all of this to give children of all abilities the chance to play the sport they love. “If I were to tell you about an organized baseball league, you might call it ordinary,” his website reads. “If I were to tell you the athletes are physically and/or mentally challenged, you might call it touching. But if you were to see them play, you would call it a miracle.”

Joseph’s mission is just that simple; he wants to create his very own miracle right here in Mississippi.