

Sports Center opening soon downtown

Historic Downtown Liberty welcomes new sports business with open arms

By Angie Anaya Borgedalen

Lee Midgett is trading a career making aluminum cans for batting cages and pitching tunnels. His business partner, Bill Porter, is keeping his day job at an engineering firm for now.

Midgett and Porter hope to open All Star Sports Center by mid-November in the former Georgetown furniture store building on Mill Street in Liberty if everything goes according to plan.

The two men met a couple of years ago when they were coaching their daughters' softball team and then decided to start their own team, Stars & Spikes.

Midgett's former job as a supervisor vanished when Ball Corp. closed its Kansas City plant earlier this year, putting 180 workers out of jobs. Midgett had transferred with Ball from Texas three years ago, and his family had fallen in love with the area.

"We loved Liberty and wanted to stay," he said. "When one door closes, another opens. We love sports, and we love kids."

Porter, who lives in Kansas City North, said friends were hosting a going-away party for the Midgett family when the two sports enthusiasts started throwing around ideas.

"They have these indoor practice facilities all over in Texas, and we thought there was a need for it here, especially in the Northland," Midgett said.

Porter, who grew up in Excelsior Springs and had been involved in sports all his life, liked the idea.

"I called him up and said, 'Are you serious?'" Porter said.

Porter said as youth sports coaches they saw the need for such a practice facility.

"We felt there was a tremendous need, especially for girls softball and boys baseball," Porter said.

The men said they also hoped to add a simulated golf station where golfers can practice their swings as well as exercise equipment and tanning beds.

THE DETAILS

- What: All Star Sports Center
- Where: 7 W. Mill St.
- Owners: Lee Midgett, Bill Porter
- Information: Call 519-2568; Web site under construction

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Lee Midgett,
owner

"We're going to take suggestions from our customers. They'll dictate what they want us to offer," Porter said. "We've also talked to some minor-league players interested in giving lessons."

Midgett said they would also have a snack area, a pro shop and offer embroidery and silk screening for sports apparel. He said the target audience for the facility will be youths involved in organized and tournament sports.

Meanwhile, the men are having the 20,000-square-foot building remodeled to make way for the batting cages and netted pitching tunnels.

"I'm really excited about this," Midgett said. "We're going into it at the prime time."

Vicki Vance, program manager for Historic Downtown Liberty Inc., a group whose mission is to promote and market the central business district, said they were thrilled with the new addition.

"It's fantastic," Vance said. "We always welcome new businesses, and it should bring foot traffic to the downtown area. I'm looking forward to meeting them."

The men said they hope to host a grand opening before the end of the year.

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