

More Great Economic News

When the minor league baseball umpire tells the two teams to play ball at the Community Maritime Park Stadium for the first time in the Spring of 2012, a new era for Downtown Pensacola will have finally begun. Please note that we are referring to Minor League (i.e. Major League Baseball affiliated team) baseball.

Thanks to the committed and community betterment efforts of Quint and Rishy Studer to acquire a Double A professional baseball team (which they did late last year) for Pensacola, a new team in the Southern League will begin play during the 2012 season. The as yet un-named team will be the Double A affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds. Within the Cincinnati Reds minor league organization, the new Pensacola team will be sandwiched between the Triple-A Louisville Bats and the Single-A Dayton Dragons. Developing players in the vast Cincinnati Reds organization will bring numerous future stars and fading greats through Pensacola as they move up and down the readiness scale of professional baseball. With those expected player moves along the hierarchy, some of the great names of baseball past and future will undoubtedly play in our downtown.

While the ability to watch and follow affiliated professional baseball right here in Pensacola will be tantalizing, we should also not overlook the direct and indirect economic benefits that 70 home games in a new downtown stadium will generate. In cities with downtown ballparks located within walking distance of downtown's bars and restaurants (like the Community Maritime Park), business activity before the games and after the games is brisk to say the least. Even a Monday or Tuesday game crowd usually looks like the peak of lunchtime on a beautiful spring day or a Gallery Night evening at the downtown bars and restaurants. Fans will come early and/or stay late if there is more to do (and more choices) than just attending a baseball game and eating a hotdog in the stadium.

We should also not overlook the great boom this new downtown attraction will have on our already growing tourism efforts. Fans, family members of players, and friends of players do travel to see games at the Double A level fairly well. When I lived in St. Louis several years ago, I knew people (serious St. Louis Cardinal Fans) in that community that annually traveled to the minor league affiliates for a long weekend of baseball to "see the prospects". These residents of the city with the Major League Affiliate (St. Louis Cardinals in my case) traveled by car or plane to the minor league cities, stayed in hotels, ate out every meal during their stay, strolled the shopping venues, bought souvenirs, and visited the local taverns – in addition to taking in three or more baseball games. They spent thousands of dollars in the minor league cities during such scouting expeditions. This will happen here in Pensacola as well.

Cincinnati is seven hundred and twelve miles from Pensacola. It is a metropolitan area of 2.1 million people. We are almost due south of them. Doesn't Pensacola with its beautiful beaches, its vibrant downtown nightlife, and its rich and long history seem like a place you would look forward to visiting each and every year to "check out the prospects" if you lived in Cincinnati?

Packaging the great assets that we already have with a minor league affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds will make our town even more attractive to visitors.

Playing other Double A teams from southern cities that are already strong feeder markets for tourists (like Birmingham, Montgomery, and Jackson) plus places like Mobile and Jacksonville will give our community even more visibility in those important tourist markets. Those cities, as well as all the communities with a team in the Southern League, and their respective ball clubs will follow and announce what our team does because it will be playing against theirs.

The arrival of an affiliated minor league baseball team in Downtown Pensacola at our new downtown stadium will take Downtown Pensacola to yet another level of economic prosperity and visibility. I can hardly wait for the Spring of 2012. Thank you Quint and Rishy.

Franklin D. Kimbrough
Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board