



FIELD OF DREAMS: South athletic director Scott Bamford stands in front of the secondary school's new James A. Giffen Memorial field.

SUSAN BRADNAM Sun Media

South completes extreme makeover

It's South secondary school's field of dreams. On Saturday, South will celebrate one of its biggest days ever, holding a Homecoming Day to officially dedicate an extreme makeover that would make the television program proud.

A new field and a new gym floor has vaulted the school into the modern era. What you'll see as you drive by the

MORRIS DALLA COSTA



school is a carpet-like sea of green, which replaced what at the end of every football season would be a sea of mud. There's a new scoreboard (installed last year), as well

as wishbone football goalposts, portable soccer nets, new bleachers and a four-lane, 200-metre all-weather track.

That's just on the surface. Everything that was old, on or in the field, was removed, including the dirt and a strip of gravel that passed as a track. Now there is new topsoil, a new irrigation system and electrical rough-ins for lights.

Much of it was made possible by a donation by South alumnus Matthew Giffen, who played football and ran track for South.

"We started a campaign in 2005 to raise money for a new gym floor," South athletic director Scott Bamford said. "The alumni association sent out letters asking for donations for the Roar for the Floor campaign."

Giffen received one of the

letters. He was in charge of the European division of a major financial institution with his office in Dublin, Ireland.

"He called and said he would be interested in helping with the fundraising, but wasn't interested so much in the floor," Bamford said. "He was more interested in the outside facilities."

See DALLA COSTA Page C4

DALLA COSTA: Donation like 'manna from heaven'

From Page C1

Bamford called him. "He came up with some ideas," Bamford said. "He talked about redoing the football field, hoping to put a track in, bleachers. I thought he had his head in the clouds. 'You've got to be kidding?'"

He wasn't. "Matt flew over and he met with us," Bamford recalled. "He promised us a cheque that became 50 per cent bigger after we took him out for breakfast."

After finding out what Giffen was looking for, Bamford met with the board of education about tenders and meeting with the construction engineers. When the engineers returned with their cost analysis, it was a lot more than Giffen had originally put in.

"(Giffen) said 'No problem,

HOMEcoming GAMES

Saturday

Volleyball, 10 a.m.

Senior girls' basketball, noon

Junior girls' basketball, 2 p.m.

Junior boys' football at Thames Park, 11 a.m.

Senior boys' football, Medway at South, 1 p.m.

whatever it takes.' He's a very humble person," Bamford said.

The exact amount of the donation is secret but the cost of the almost complete makeover is around \$500,000.

"Most of it's from Matt," Bamford said.

The field will be named the James A. Giffen Memorial Field after Matt's father, a former London lawyer who

passed away suddenly of a heart attack. Matt, currently working in Singapore, will be back for the dedication.

"Matt says the best memories of his dad was him walking up and down the field watching him play football," Bamford said. "He's doing it to honour his father but it's an honour for the South community to have it happen."

Bamford has been the athletic director at South since 1994. He's seen the board of education struggle financially to find money for such things as upkeep of football fields.

"I used to go to the co-op in Ilderton and buy fertilizer and put it on the field on my own," he said. "This donation is like manna from heaven."

When you add the new \$200,000 wood gym floor from money raised in the Roar for the Floor campaign, South's facilities are first class.

Homecoming Day will feature several sports events, including a senior football game between South and Medway on the new field at 1 p.m., weather permitting. They are going to look after the "best interests of the field," Bamford said.

There will also be two dedication ceremonies. A donor wall will be unveiled at 11:45 a.m. outside the gym and the new field will be dedicated at 12:45 p.m.

There will be barbecues and an evening adult dance to make the celebration a day-long event.

Bamford stood on the new turf and looked around.

"The whole thing... it's really been something," he said.

Morris Dalla Costa is Free Press sports columnist. mdalla-costa@lfp.com