

Juuuust a bit outside: a childhood dream, turned into a nightmare

By CHARLIE POGACAR
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

About six weeks ago, one of my closest friends got to live out what is a childhood dream for any lover of baseball. The owner of a bar in San Francisco—and a lifelong, die-hard Giants fan—Jesse was asked to throw out a ceremonial first pitch at a Giants-Dodgers game.

He practiced on-and-off the week leading up to his big moment. When the day arrived, he went out in front of 30,000 people and... well, he threw a pitch that traveled about six feet wide of the strike zone. It bounced in the dirt and went rolling to the backstop as the backup bullpen catcher lightly jogged after it. It was a beautiful moment nonetheless—a true bucket-list item he had checked off.

By pure coincidence, days later, my father-in-law asked if I'd like to throw out the first pitch at a Burlington Sock Puppets' game. The requirement, he said, was wearing a hat and shirt representing his employer, a construction company (that shall remain nameless for reasons that will soon become clear). I told him I'd tattoo the company's logo on my face if it meant an opportunity to throw out a first pitch.

Growing up, baseball was the sport I played year-round. I was a pitcher throughout Little League, and into high school. I even pitched a year of club baseball in college—recording the first-ever win for my alma mater's new baseball program back in 2009. I made the alumni magazine: my baseball peak, looking back on it.

Needless to say, holding back my excitement at the prospect of throwing a baseball from the mound in front of a minor-league stadium full of fans was difficult, if not impossible. In fact, it was a boyhood dream.

As the day approached, I started battling nerves. I wondered if I'd hurl a strike, or if I'd bury one in the dirt like Jesse—from moment to moment, I vacillated between confidence and utter fear. I called Jesse, figuring nobody would have better advice for me than someone who had recently done it.

"You'll be fine," he told me. "First of all, you pitched all of your life. Second of all, it's not like there will be 30,000 fans there."

The former part of that message was encouraging. The latter part verged on rude—the Burlington Sock Puppets may not get MLB-size crowds, but it's a great product. I wholeheartedly encourage anyone reading this to go to a Sock Puppets' game this season. It's good baseball, and the gameday experience makes for a great time with friends and family. There is a playground and a bouncy house for kids, and ice-cold beer with a fine array of affordable concessions.

My big day finally arrived last week. On the night of, about 15 minutes before the first pitch, I was directed toward a group of employees for the team. They were incredibly kind, welcoming, and professional—here I'll give a hearty shoutout to the entire Sock Puppets' staff.

However, they also had a curveball, of sorts, to throw at me.

"You'll be throwing a pair of socks," a woman told me.

My heart sank. I practically felt the signature camera from "The Office" zoomed in on my face to capture my real-time reaction. I must've misheard her. "Socks?" I asked, like a kid who had just opened up a Christmas present only to discover it was, well, socks.

"Yeah, we call it 'First Sock,'" she said. Oh no.

I'll pause here to say that I had told about 20 different people I would be throwing out a first pitch. My wife, my two young daughters, and nearly all of my in-laws had come out to watch me try and throw a 60-mph heater into the strike zone from 60 feet, 6 inches. Instead, I'd be throwing a balled-up pair of socks toward a mascot, holding a hamper, from 30 feet away.

You might say this revelation was challenging to emotionally recover from. I'd had a beautiful image in my head for weeks on end. I'd barely slept the night before fantasizing about blazing a fastball across the black, turning the heads of the scouts in attendance (this is mostly a joke, I promise). I'd spent dozens of minutes practicing earlier that day, throwing a four seamer into a net in my yard. I'd recorded video of these throws to pour over like a pitching coach.

No, I'd be throwing socks. To a mascot. From 30 feet away.

Another gentleman and his sons took the field with me.

He went first, throwing a Greg Maddux-like fast-sock into the hamper. The mascot barely had to move its fuzzy arms.

It was my turn. The emcee struggled to remember my name. So did I. He struggled to remember what company I was representing. So did I. Finally, when he'd found both data points in his notes and announced my name, I broke into a Hideo Nomo routine, attempting to have some fun with it, bringing my hands high over my head, kicking my leg up behind my body, unwinding like this was something I'd done my entire life. I let the socks go.

The pair of socks flew no fewer than 15 feet over the mascot's oversized head. Rumor has it the socks are still airborne today, scheduled to come down in the next few months—I've heard the FAA has eyes on them.

I can confidently say I'd thrown the worst First Sock in history.

The crowd groaned. I shuffled off the field, my head down, defeated. I kissed my wife. I hugged my daughters. We went home in a hurry—it was past their bedtimes, and I didn't want to risk being recognized as the man who'd thrown dirty laundry into orbit.

Once the girls were in bed and asleep, I began sending texts to those who I'd told beforehand about my "first pitch," the one that never happened. Most of the texts started something like this:

"Boy, do I have a story for you..."



'Everyone's Playground' at Cates Farm Park

By KELLY HUNTER
SPECIAL TO THE
MEBANE ENTERPRISE

A vital part of exploration and education about the outdoor world begins at a young age by playing on playgrounds. Playgrounds provide children with an environment suitable for engaging in unstructured play. Unstructured play is crucial for helping to develop a child's emotional, social, and creative thinking skills. Children learn many valuable life skills on the playground, such as self-confidence, social skills, motor control skills, and other essential habits and attitudes they will carry with them throughout life. As the City of Mebane continues to see unprecedented growth, city officials and staff wanted to ensure that our "Positively Charming" community included a park with a playground accessible to all children so that every child can develop these crucial cognitive and emotional skills.

In 2017, the City of Mebane acquired 54 acres of land to construct Cates Farm Park at 1169 N First Street, Mebane, NC 27302. Formerly a pickle farm, Cates Farm Park now serves as a public park with 2.0 miles of trails and, upon completion, will house an ADA-accessible playground. The city partnered with Impact Alamance to help fund the trails and playground portion of the entire project, and in January 2021, the pet-friendly trails at Cates Farm Park officially opened to the public. Once the trails were open, the park entered the project's next phase: constructing the entryway, the public parking lot, a shelter with two picnic tables, two gender-neutral restrooms, and an all-inclusive playground titled "Everyone's Playground." Before any of this work could begin, the city had to perform a topographic and boundary survey to establish property lines and Duke Energy easements as well as outline the wetlands and streams on the property. Following the study, city officials had to design the park layout from the driveway to the parking lot arrangement, picnic shelter design, playground format, and all other site amenities. Next, the city had to obtain an erosion control permit for this property and receive a letter of no objection to working within the Duke Energy right-of-way. Once the surveys were conducted and the permits were obtained, site improvements needed to be completed before construction on the physical playground could begin.

The City of Mebane received multiple bids from differ-



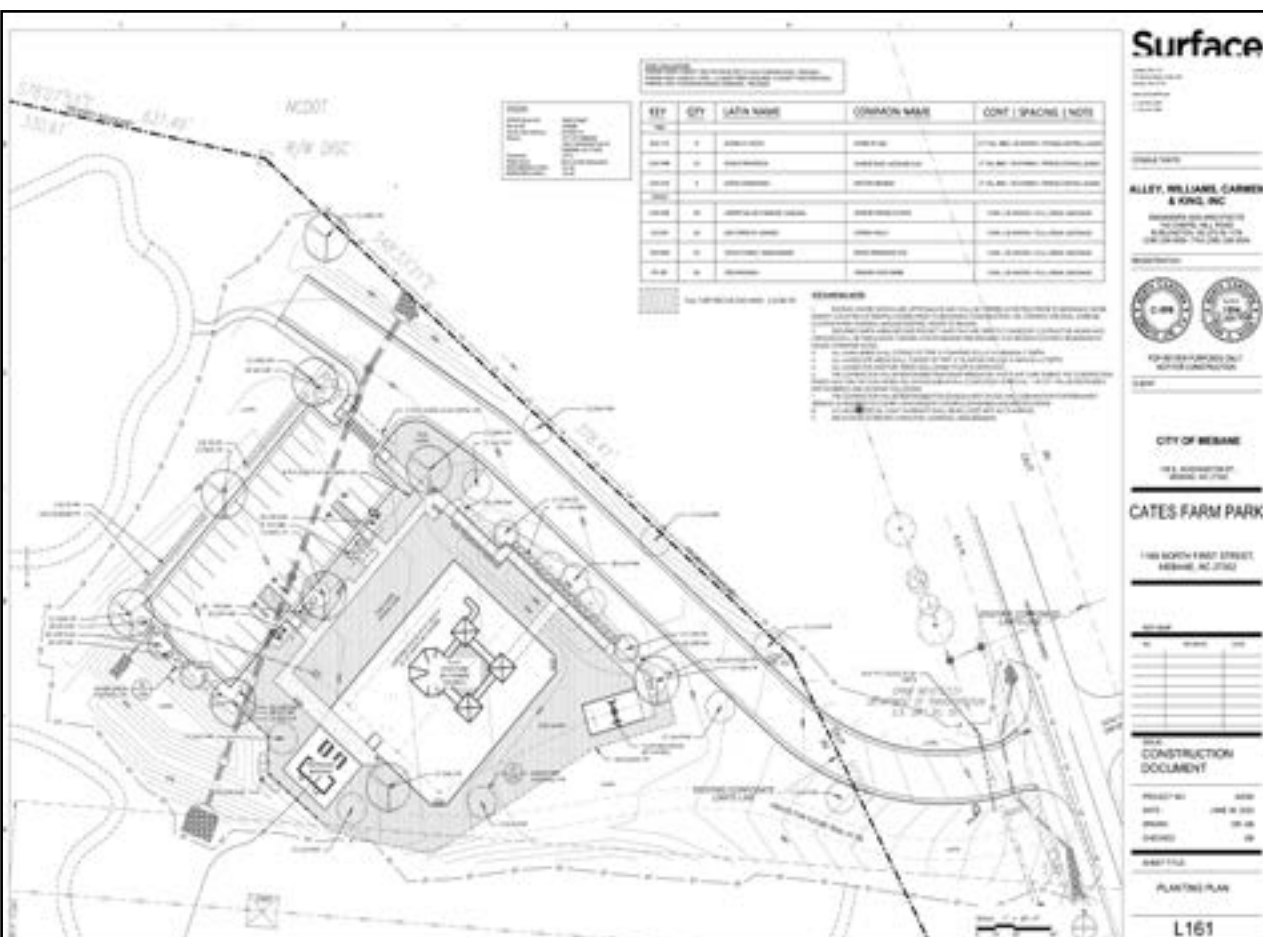
Submitted Photo

ent contractors, and in October 2022, the project bid was approved at the October City Council meeting. The following contractors were awarded the bid: Central Builders, Inc. of Mebane, Beanstalk Builders, Alley, Williams, Carmen, & King (AWCK), Surface 678, Pilot Environmental Inc., and Atlantic Coast Engineering & Testing Inc. These contractors and the City of Mebane Public Works Department, Public Utilities Department, Engineering Department, Planning and Inspections Department, and Recreation and Parks Department are all working together to establish and implement the following site improvements: grading work to level the park floor, installation of storm drainage pipes and erosion control measures, the performing of soil compaction tests and material testing on site, building of water and sewer services to the park for the picnic shelters and restrooms, construction of the shelters and restrooms, handicap parking and accessible sidewalks to be included at the park, and a complete landscaping plan that parks users with find aesthetically pleasing. "While parking is available on site, additional future access (bike and pedestrian) will be constructed via a multi-use path along N. First Street. As the new developments occur along Stagecoach Road, they will be connecting ex-


isting sidewalks/paths along N. First Street Pocket Park, Historic Downtown, Mebane Community Park, and Lake Michael" Franz Holt, City Engineer. On-site furnishings such as trash cans, benches, ADA picnic tables, and bike racks were also selected to match. The site improvements are expected to be completed in September 2023, so the work on the playground can start in October 2023 with an estimated completion date of March 2024.

"Everyone's Playground" is a step forward into the future for the City of Mebane. The all-inclusive ADA-accessible playground will include a slide, wheelchair swing, cargo net, interconnecting bridges, and more.

We ask that citizens please be patient during this time, as construction will require portions of the trails to be closed at certain times. When the trails are closed, the entire park will be closed to the public to avoid safety risks to patrons visiting the park. Aaron Davis, Recreation and Parks Director, states, "The City of Mebane is so excited to complete "Everyone's Playground," an inclusive playground, unlike anything currently in Alamance County. We are happy to provide this wonderful park and playground to our community and look forward to seeing our citizens smiling while making memories at Cates Farm Park."



Submitted Photo



Find the right senior living option for your mom or dad with our personalized process

Our service is free, as we're paid by our participating communities and providers.

1-855-948-1935

aPlaceforMom.
THE PLACE FOR SENIOR LIVING ADVICE