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Deadline nears for Broncos' new field

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Elisabeth Nardi
 Staff writer

The architect is putting final touches on the design. Contractors have made their bids and the artificial turf has been selected.

The new sports complex at Northgate High School is \$100,000 away from becoming a reality. But if the money is not raised soon, the dream of a new field may fade.

The Northgate Community Pride Foundation, which raises money for capital projects at the high school, has been working to raise \$1.3 million for an all-weather track and field.

"I am cautiously optimistic we will raise the money, but it is probably crisis time," said Kassie Wenzell, project leader for the foundation.

The crisis being that a \$300,000 grant from the Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation was pledged to the project two years ago but it had an expiration date: If all the money for the project is not raised by Sept. 15, the grant will not be awarded.

So Northgate Pride is trying to do another big push for funding. The foundation has raised the money through grants and district support, and \$700,000 alone came from families who have joined the "500 Club," basically pledging money in \$500 increments, Wenzell said.

"The bulk of funding has come from families who have given \$500," she said. "It really has been a cornerstone of the project. It's really exciting because it shows it's a community-driven project."

It's also a project that many feel is long overdue. With ruts and divots, as well as improper drainage so water pools on the field, the rough turf has caused student injuries.

A inadequate field and unsuitable track have been a ongoing struggle for the school. It took the football team more than 30 years, but in 2004 it finally was able to play on its home field.

Those on the school's soccer, lacrosse and track teams simply would like to experience what home-court advantage feels like, but the field is unsuitable for game play.

In 2004, Northgate received goal posts and a scoreboard, which qualified it for home football games. That was phase one of the Pride Foundation project. The renovation of the track and field, with artificial turf and an all-weather track, is considered phase two. If the money is raised, the complex could be finished by December, Wenzell said.

There are some groups and individuals who have said they would match funds or wanted to wait so see how much money came in, Wenzell said.

"We do feel like there are people out there who have been waiting to donate or taking their time, and that time is now," she said.

But this is not the first time the foundation has asked for money from the community. A renovation of the school's Little Theatre last year was paid for in part from district funding and community fundraising through the foundation.

And the foundation has had two years to raise the money before the expiration of the grant, but it has been hard, Wenzell said.

"It's very difficult to raise money for something that people feel should have been paid for by the school district," she said. "That is really great in an ideal world, but we don't live in an ideal world, and in the state of California there are no provisions for facility funding. The money is not there so let's find another way."

For information or to donate money, go to www.northgatepride.org or call 939-6273.

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