

FIELD OF DREAMS

Strong Center, a vision realized

By Rita Papazian
Special to the Times

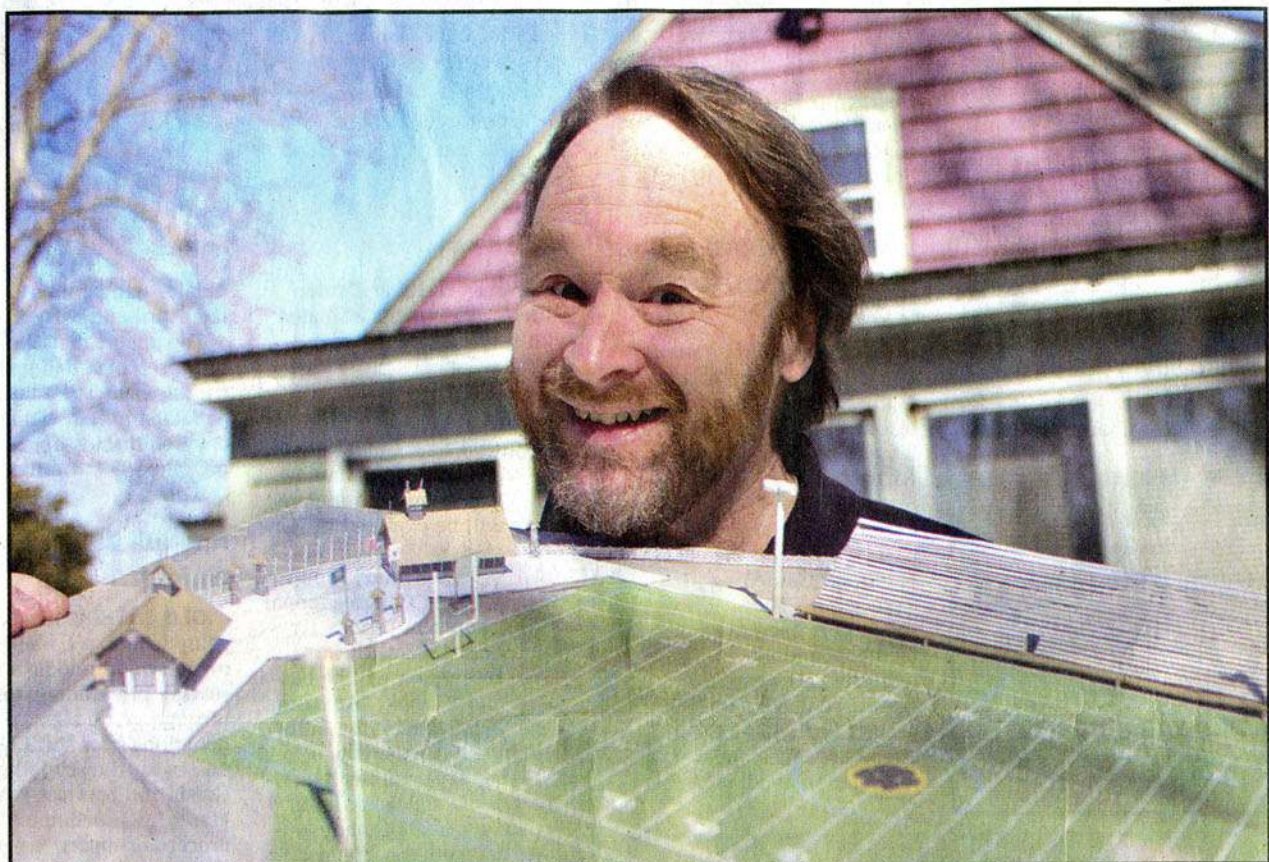
MADISON - When 18-year-old Aja Gerrity of Vancouver, WA died tragically in a car accident last August, the grief from this aspiring actress's sudden death, was felt locally where her father Jamie Gerrity and aunt Pam Gerrity Kadamus, were 1977 and 1978, respectively, graduates of Daniel Hand High School. Her aunt and grandmother, Jean Gerrity, still live in Madison and are local real estate agents.

Aside from the grief family members still endure from this young teen's death, a month before she was to begin studies at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Manhattan, comes the question of how to honor her life?

Kadamus and have members have decided to establish a "fitting memorial" to her life by naming one of the Champions Hall of Fame in her honor at the proposed Strong Center at the Surf Club, a proposed cultural and sports facility at the current Strong Field.

The proposed facility, estimated to cost \$3.4 million and financed with private funding, will be constructed within the existing site and include a multi-purpose athletic field, two field houses, a concession stand, a new home stadium, and an entry plaza that will celebrate the accomplishments of Daniel Hand High School teams. Proponents for the proposed facility, including architect Duo Dickinson, and Larry Ciotti, former Hand coach and athletic director, who is currently assistant football coach at Yale University, say the new facility will be enjoyed by the arts community and sports enthusiasts for generations to come.

Kadamus who has taken on the challenge to raise \$25,000 for the naming rights to one of the two Halls of Fame,



If you build it they will come...Madison architect Duo Dickinson shows his model for the planned Strong Field Center, a sports and cultural facility at the Surf Club.

acknowledges that "this is an ambitious goal, but as all of who knew Aja, saw in her the will to surpass expectations." She believes naming the Hall of Fame in her niece's honor is a fitting tribute because it will honor Hand's athletes and teams. Aja's father Jamie was a member of the Hand football team for four years; Kadamus was member of the high school's gymnastic team during 1974-78 when the team won

the state championships and her two daughters have played field hockey and lacrosse for the high school.

Kadamus believes the Strong Center's naming opportunities offer the community a wonderful way to honor loved ones and community leaders.

The Garrity family of Garrity Industries has given a private donation of \$100,000 for the naming rights to the plaza entrance, in addition, there are

a number of opportunities for naming rights through private donations. These include the naming of the field, team field house, plaza benches, gold, silver and bronze plaques, alumni wall, plaza stone and the boys Hall of Fame..

During a recent interview in his office Dickinson said the "essential issue" with Strong Field has been the existing grass field. It's current location and close proximity to the water has

See **STRONG CENTER**, Page 8

8 • SHORE LINE TIMES • Friday, February 26, 2010

Strong Center: A vision to become reality

From page 1

made it a difficult field for sporting events. The proposed improvement plan notes that by using synthetic turf fields and reorienting on the site, them the community can have a multi-sport facility for baseball, football, hockey, lacrosse, completely usable for three full seasons a year.

The proposal also includes a new stadium with hand-capped accessible seating; two new field houses with a terrace between them. Each field house, with lockers and restrooms would include a Hall of Fame, one spotlighting the girls' athletic achievements and the other the boys' achieve-

ments. The field houses could be used as locker rooms for sports teams as well as dressing rooms for cultural events.

Dickinson spoke enthusiastically of having a turf multi-purpose field not only for sporting events but also for cultural events as well. He envisions the field accommodating Shakespeare productions, cheerleading and band competitions, concerts and other cultural venues.

Ciotti, with his 27-year teaching, coaching and administrative career at Daniel Hand, is well familiar with the high school's athletic accomplishments and feels very strongly that this new Strong Center

would be a fitting tribute to the high school's legacy in sports and would be a revered venue for athletics and cultural arts.

"The site is a gem on the shoreline," he said.

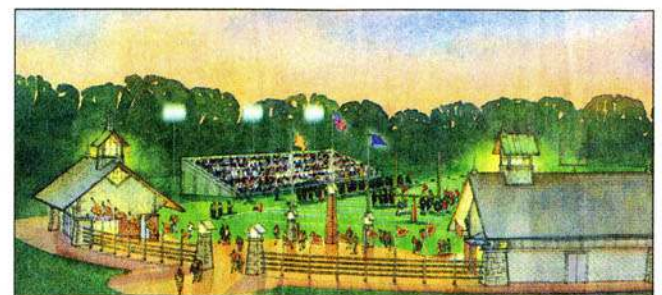
Both Ciotti and Dickinson emphasized that the project would be accomplished with private funding with maintenance costs from the existing town maintenance budget. They said "there's money in the pipeline" for Strong Field maintenance.

In addition to Ciotti and Dickinson, the Board of Directors of the Strong Center At The Surf Club includes: Steve Bull, Kevin Garrity, Brian Hughes, Allen Jackson, Sue

Lutz, Jon Mayhew, Camille Murphy, Matt Rubano and Ken Sweitzer.

The Board of Advisors includes: Duane Crisco, Peter Dalton, Charles Dowd, Bob Fowler, Rick Duques, Lucinda Embersits, Rich Gentile, Jeff Lent, Mike Off, Sheri Pasqualoni, Kevin Murphy and Mike Simmons.

From a personal perspective, Dickinson noted how his own family would fit in well with the proposed plan for the Strong Field and its adaptability for sports and cultural events. He said one son, a senior at Hand High School is a member of the football team. His other son is attend-



A rendering of the proposed sports and cultural facility.

ing Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. He said the Strong Center would offer accommodations for families like his own.

The proponents of this Strong Center project say that the naming rights is a special opportunity to honor loved ones, especially in an athletic facility that honors youth through its Hall of Fame. It's poignant to read Aja Garrity's

obituary in which this young woman "lived a life fully without regrets" She was a young woman "whose outward beauty was only paralleled by her inward spirit. Aja was determined and persistent in her pursuits and had an unwavering spirit to succeed."

For more information on the project contact Duo Dickinson at 203-245-0405 or email duo.dickinson@snet.net.