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News for Darien

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Goal of \$750K Raised for Permanent Stadium Lights at Darien High School

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Permanent stadium lights are coming to Darien High School, starting in June, now that the fundraising goal of \$750,000 has been met, in the Darien Athletic Foundation announced.

Here's the news release:

The Darien Athletic Foundation announced today that The Darien Foundation led a group of philanthropists to enable the Darien Lights Brigade capital campaign to reach its goal of raising \$750,000 by May 1.

Achieving the funding goal paves the way for installation of the state of the art LED stadium lights to begin

next month.

“The dream of a generation of Darien’s youth will be realized this coming fall sports season.” said Peter Graham, President of the Darien Athletic Foundation.

“The Darien Foundation had the vision to become DAF’s lead donor in 2013 when DAF was only six months old,” Graham said. “Now, The Darien Foundation’s generosity is enabling the long-awaited Darien High School Stadium lights to become a reality.”

Pam Dysenchuk, executive director of The Darien Foundation said, “The Darien Foundation commends the tireless fundraising efforts of the Darien Lights Brigade and we are delighted to provide this \$25,000 grant which got them to their \$750,000 goal by the May 1 deadline.”

“Last fall, the DAF Board of Directors decided to form a lights capital campaign committee to raise \$750,000 in only seven months.” said Jennifer Montanaro, Vice President of Marketing for the DAF. “We wanted to be in a financial position to be able to install stadium lights this summer.”

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Susan Graham, one of the co-chairs of the lights capital campaign committee, along with Jenn Montanaro and Susan Hamill, said “We decided to brand the committee as the Darien Lights Brigade and leverage the DAF’s powerful social media presence.

“We assembled a fantastic group of about 25 hard working committee members. Jenny Murphy, a social media professional, volunteered to manage the social media campaign.”

According to Susan Hamill, the third co-chair:

“The strategy was to have a series of fundraising events. Over forty businesses participated in some fashion. The businesses benefited from the exposure by the DAF’s social media network.

“The fundraising events generated \$1,000-\$25,000 per event and more importantly, raised awareness which resulted in more online donations, particularly from new donors with younger children. We are finishing the campaign with over 750 donors, which is over triple the number that we were expecting.”

Long History of Getting Lights

The road to securing lights at the Stadium Field has been a very long and challenging.

In 1994, a group led by DYLAX co-founder Lang Clarke, proposed stadium lights. The Board of Education approved stadium lights but its application was turned down by the Planning & Zoning Commission in face of opposition by neighbors.

The effort was revived again **in 2006** by a group led by Rusty Schriener. After conducting a detailed study, the Board of Education again approved stadium lights. However, the Planning & Zoning Commission refused to hear the Board of Education’s application, declaring that the stadium lights were not consistent with the 2006 Town Plan of Conservation & Development.

Following the community’s uproar over that decision, the DJFL led an effort to permit 20-foot temporary lights for late autumn practices for a few weeks at the stadium and at the Town Hall field. The Darien Foundation provided a grant to enable the stadium field’s temporary lights.

When the Darien Athletic Foundation was founded in 2012, its original master plan did not include stadium lights, because, according to Mark Maybell, one of the founders of the DAF and its chairman.

“Stadium lights were widely considered a controversial and emotional issue and we did not want to distract from the plan’s primary focus on increasing the utility of existing field space in the youngest town in Connecticut,” Maybell said.

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Beginning **in 2013**, the DAF met with over 500 people during hundreds of public information sessions to present the DAF's master plan and to solicit ideas for additional projects.

“Through this process it became quite clear that resistance to permanent stadium lights had largely dissipated and frustration continued to mount because Darien was only town in the FCIAC left without permanent lights. Even since 2008, the town's population had become much younger and lighting technology had vastly improved,” Maybell said.

In 2016, Dr. Dan Brenner, superintendent of the Darien Public Schools reached a compromise with a small group of Darien High School neighbors who expressed concerns on the proposed usage parameters of stadium lights.

With the agreement in place the Board of Education unanimously approved stadium lights, as did the Board of Selectmen, led by First Selectman Jayme Stevenson, who had long publicly supported stadium lights.

After issuing a positive mandatory referral in 2016, earlier **this year** the Planning & Zoning Commission, under the leadership of chairman John Sini, approved regulation changes and a special permit which allows for the installation and use of the permanent lights and the new sound system.

On March 1, the RTM voted 68 to 1 to accept the DAF's gift which was the last step in the town's approval process.

What's Next

“We have been meeting with representatives from Musco Sports Lighting and will be ready to begin installation of the state of the art LED stadium lights and a new sound system immediately after graduation”, said Lou Gesualdi, Vice President of the DAF, who oversees projects.

Also this summer, the district plans to replace the stadium turf and resurface the track. It is expected that the lights and sound system will be operational for the entire 2017 fall sports season.

DAF Thanks the Community

On behalf of the Darien Lights Brigade, the DAF is extremely grateful for the broad community support it has received for this fundraising effort.

This gift will prove to not only benefit hundreds of our youth and student athletes each year, but also delivers a valuable town asset that will further enhance Darien's strong sense of community spirit and Blue Wave Pride.