

## September 13, 2008

(Daily Press) Ex-Phillies' player Wayne Gomes seeks home to teach kids. An ex-Major League ballplayer hopes to manage a baseball program for low-income children. By [MATTHEW STURDEVANT](#) | 247-7874

HAMPTON - — The baseball field behind the [Peninsula Metropolitan YMCA](#) on LaSalle Avenue looks a little scruffy.

The weeds have grown up in places, and there's not much of a pitcher's mound. But it's a perfectly good place to play, right behind the YMCA and Hampton's Health District building. Wayne Gomes looks at the diamond and sees a place where the future generation of baseball greats will learn and perfect the game.

Gomes (pronounced "GOMZ") grew up in the Phoebus area of Hampton, where he was a pitcher. He played for [Old Dominion University](#) and, in 1993, was selected by the Philadelphia Phillies as the fourth overall pick in the first round. Gomes retired from Major League Baseball in 2003. He returned to [Hampton Roads](#) with the goal of starting several camps and training opportunities available to children from as young as 7 to teens — and even college students who come home to the Peninsula for the summer.

Gomes' Virginia Baseball Academy has a staff of people who played collegiate and professional baseball. He also manages travel leagues for kids. But in the three years of operating the baseball academy, he has split his time training children and teens at War Memorial Stadium and the [Boo Williams Sportsplex](#).

"Wayne wants to do something similar with baseball as Boo Williams is doing with basketball," Hampton City Manager Jesse Wallace said.

Gomes was looking for a more centralized location and has been working with Wallace to negotiate a lease of the ball field behind the YMCA, as well as about 8,300 square feet in the building that houses the YMCA and the health district.

The building was a high school, and the area that Gomes wants to lease is the former auditorium, which could house the batting cages he stores at the Sportsplex.

The building and the land are managed by the Hampton Redevelopment and Housing Authority, an entity separate from the city.

The authority's board will have to approve the lease, and Wallace said he was going to recommend that Gomes be able to lease the building and land for a nominal price, \$1 for example.

In exchange, Gomes will operate a baseball program for low-income children and teens, Wallace said.

Wallace will talk to the authority board about the plan during the board's Sept. 24 meeting.

Gomes said that he was excited about the opportunity and that Major League Baseball provided financial support for a program called Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, or RBI.

*The Peninsula Metropolitan YMCA is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. We have been building strong kids, strong families and strong communities on the Peninsula and in surrounding communities since 1896. Our mission is "To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all." The YMCA is open to everyone regardless of age, race, gender, national origin or religion; and makes scholarships available so everyone who wants to participate may do so.*

## Peninsula YMCA "In the News"

The level of baseball being played will be different from the training at the academy, Gomes said, but there's a famous ballplayer waiting to be discovered who doesn't have the opportunity to play because of the cost of camps.

Baseball is also a way to keep teens active, he said: "I hope to keep these kids off the street ... to give them another option."

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