

Kirk, others are angered by Nike stance on complex

By MARLENE HUNT
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Local politicians are upset Nike Inc. is playing the trademark card to prohibit using the word "Nike" to name a new area sports complex. And they have pledged to do something about it.

State Rep. Kathy Ryg, D-59th, of Vernon Hills has already written a letter. Sen. Terry Link, D-30th, of Lake Bluff is writing one and bending the ear of Gov. Rod Blagojevich. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, called Nike recently suggesting the company "lighten up."

The former 164-acre military missile base and aviation training center, known for years as the Nike Site, is being developed by the village of Vernon Hills and local school districts. The master plan shows athletic playing fields for Stevenson High School, Libertyville and Vernon Hills High Schools and the Lincolnshire-Prairie View schools to support football, baseball, softball, soccer, hockey, lacrosse as well as open space for recreational enjoyment.

Just saying no

Village and school officials wanted to name the new sports complex the Nike Sports Complex of Vernon Hills to commemorate its history. But when the Nike Corporation was contacted, company officials said "no" as it would infringe on its world-famous trademark.

"They should lighten up," said Kirk. "I would have hoped Nike would have recognized the significance of the name in the area and the length of time it was used. The ball is in their court."

The congressman, also a U.S. Naval intelligence officer in the reserves, thinks Nike is losing the overall picture over the issue and causing ill will for the communities.

"I hope they rethink this and create better will for the communities," Kirk said. "Frankly, I was surprised they took an overly legalistic and somewhat hostile approach. This is a place where kids are going to play on land that once supported the national defense of our country."

Kirk has a keen interest in the project and personally took the cause to the Secretary of the Navy to release a needed \$3 million used to remove contamination to address environmental concerns so the land would be clean and support the future development of the site and the children who use it.

Other officials were equally indignant over Nike's stance said to protect its famed trademark.

"I would encourage the Nike Corporation to consider the benefits of using the Nike name for this site; it is a well-deserved tribute to the many veterans in our region," Ryg said. "The Nike site is also a wonderful example of intergovernmental cooperation. I hope the Nike Corporation can find a way to partner in this effort."

Facility or company?

Sen. Link is unhappy over the turn of events.

"Nike has gone far beyond the ideal of a sports facility and compared it to a sporting goods company. This is something long affiliated and tied to our men and women in the armed service in our local area. I would strongly urge the Nike cor-

poration to reconsider its thinking."

While Nike officials have not visited the former missile base, Ryg reminded the corporation in her letter the redevelopment was not a commercial venture but designated for public use for three school districts and park district programs. Some of the land is under construction to provide an extension of Fairway Drive to alleviate area traffic congestion, said Ryg, who served on the committee formed of community groups who worked to obtain the surplus government property. Kirk, Link and Ryg believe that the Nike Corporation is unaware of the strong public sentiment relating to the history and planned reuse of the former military base, which was released for public use through the historic BRAC legislation signed into law by former president Bill Clinton.

"The complex is currently referred to as the Nike Site because it was used by the Department of the Army to building missile magazines for Nike missiles. The site was decommissioned in 1964 and was officially closed in 1995," Ryg said in her letter to Philip H. Knight, Nike's CEO, president and chairman.

Area veterans are angered, noting reference to the Nike site began long before the multibillion corporation trademarked the name commonly referred to the mythological winged goddess of victory.

Craig Warner, adjutant of Vernon Hills American Legion Post 1247 served on a special committee to come up with ideas to preserve the history of the site by incorporating the word "Nike" into the title of the complex.

"I'm very disappointed that the Nike Corporation feel they own the word 'Nike' to the extent that we could not use it," said Warner, a commercial airline pilot and veteran of both the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Marine Corps. "The Nike site has a unique history. The use of the name to incorporate history through the theme is a wonderful way to teach history and what sacrifices were made by the brave men and women in World War II and the Cold War years," Warner said.

'Ease up'

Retired police officer and veteran John Taylor, commander of the Legion post, hoped Nike's legal staff "would ease up on their restrictions."

Warner agreed: "I would think the corporation would sit down and say 'Here's the problem we have' and then work together to figure out a way that it could be used in the title of the sports complex."

Vernon Hills was informed that while use of the corporate name was OK in a planned memorial plaque depicting the military base history, the company legal spokesman Kenneth Kwartler wrote in a letter Oct. 15: "We best believe that 'Nike' has no proper place in your sports facility's name. Accordingly, we must decline your request and ask that you select a different name that does not include our world-famous trademark." A Nike media spokesman in New York who was contacted seemed surprised by the public reaction and said he would look into it. However, calls were then referred to Vada Manager, director of global issues, based in Beaverton, Ore. He was out of the country and could not be reached for comment.

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