

# FEATURES

## 10th Anniversary

### Indians Celebrate 10th Anniversary of Victory Field

by Marc D. Allan

Any parent knows how this feels: One day, you're bringing home a newborn. The next day -- or so it seems -- that little baby is about to turn 10.

Hard to believe, but Victory Field, the Indianapolis Indians' baby, celebrates its 10th birthday this summer. On July 3, 1996, the Indians said goodbye to Bush Stadium, the beloved ballpark on West 16th Street that had been their home for 65 years. Eight days later, they opened at Victory Field, their jewel on the southwest corner of downtown Indianapolis.

"I'm amazed," Indians President and Chairman of the Board Max Schumacher says. "When I think about all the planning that went into that

mid-season move, it seems impossible that 10 years have gone by."

For Triple-A baseball in Indianapolis, it's been a great decade for fans, players, coaches and team management alike. In 10 years, fans have seen a division championship in 1996, a Triple-A World Series title in 2000, a 14-game winning streak in 1997, a no-hitter (by the Tribe's Ian Snell on May 15, 2005 -- the Tribe's first since 1974),

a seven-inning perfect game (by Syracuse's Leo Estrella on June 17, 2000), a World Series hero pitch on Opening

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Day (Curt Schilling on April 7, 2005) and a Triple-A All-Star Game in which Adam Dunn deposited two titanic home runs onto West Street.

We've seen future stars playing for the home team -- Zach Duke, Sean Casey and Ben Sheets -- as well as the opposition -- Nomar Garciaparra, Alfonso Soriano, Jason Istringhausen and Jimmy Rollins. Some were just getting started; others came to town on rehabilitation assignments.

In making the move from the west side to the heart of downtown, the Indians essentially swapped mini-Wrigley Field for mini-Camden Yards. The new stadium offered amenities any 21st-century fan could want, from larger concession stands to the outfield lawn, in a central location easily accessible to everyone.

At Bush Stadium, the Indians typically drew about 350,000 fans a season. The Victory Field totals: 550,000. Twice, the Tribe attendance topped 600,000.

"Victory Field," Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson says, "is one of the jewels of our world-class downtown and a destination place for families, downtown workers and residents looking for a relaxing, fun-filled atmosphere."

No doubt, Victory Field has been great for fans. The 4,000-space state government garage across the street allows for convenient, inexpensive parking, and prices for both tickets and concessions have been stable, leaving the team's promise of low-cost family entertainment intact. "And we never had any doubt it would," Schumacher says.

Kerry Smith has been an Indians' season-ticket holder since 1986. His firm, Circle Design Group, did the mechanical and electrical design for Victory Field. Smith loved Bush Stadium. But when the Tribe started discussing a new ballpark, he was in favor.

"I felt there were a lot of amenities I saw at other ballparks that I thought would make the baseball experience better if we could get a new stadium here," Smith says. "So I was very much in favor of a new one." Smith always thought the Indians should play downtown, and he wanted extras like wider concourses where you could see the game while waiting in line for concessions.

He also raves about the extraordinary view of the city skyline. "I think it's a much better experience,"

he says. "I think this design is much better."

You won't hear any arguments from Dave Miley. Miley, who now manages the Columbus Clippers, was the Indians skipper when they made the switch from Bush to Victory. He also played at Bush on his way through the minors. While he appreciated the history, "it was time to move on."

Walking into the brand-new Victory Field that July 11, he was happy to see modern locker rooms and the indoor batting cages that allowed players to work out even during bad weather. Coupled with the increased attendance, it added up to a home-field advantage for the Indians.

"When we moved in (to Victory Field), you could just see the excitement on the players' faces," Miley says. "They did a terrific job building that place. It definitely brought smiles to the faces of everyone involved. I don't want to use the terminology night and day, but that's basically what it was. And even the last time I was through there, in '03, it looks almost like it did on day one."

The Indians have seen to that. In the old days, the city of Indianapolis was responsible for Bush Stadium maintenance.

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Now, the Tribe takes responsibility for upkeep at their home park. Schumacher says the team spent upwards of \$300,000 this winter to keep the ballpark looking great.

The bottom line, he says, is that while old loves die hard, Victory Field has turned out to be so superb that it has made Bush Stadium a distant memory.

"I can't tell you how many hundreds of times people have said to me that they loved Bush Stadium and really, kind of silently, were not supporting me when I was promoting the possibility of a new ballpark," Schumacher says. "But they said the first time they went to Victory Field, they could see what I was talking about."

*Marc Allan, who has been writing stories for the Indians' program for more than a decade, never met a Tribe fan he didn't like.*