

Ever wonder what happens when a dedicated middle school student decides to enrich the world through community service?

This is exactly what Lawson Strenecky did by building a single project into a successful non-profit organization called Play Ball Puerto Rico (PBPR).

Lawson was motivated to help the people of Puerto Rico after the Island was devastated by Hurricane Maria in 2017. At the time, he was an 8th grade student with a passion for baseball and helping others. Lawson, who lives and attends school in Bardstown, Kentucky, discovered that baseball was the heart and soul of life in Puerto Rico.

With the help of his grandparents, Bernie and Eileen Strenecky, he led the effort to gather equipment to outfit a boys and girls team in the Hurricane-ravaged community of Guanica, located in the southeast corner of Puerto Rico.

Out of this successful project grew Play Ball Puerto Rico (PBPR) which was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2020. The mission of PBPR is to build citizens through baseball. It is made up of all volunteers who serve as Executive Staff and as members of the Board of Directors. PBPR has raised funds and other resources from community and corporate partners, including the Prospect Goshen Rotary Club of Louisville, Kentucky; Louisville Slugger (the corporate icon that supplies Major League Baseball with bats, gloves, and other equipment); and the UNA Puerto Rico and Scranton chapters. Private individuals also generously donated money, equipment, and other resources towards this noble endeavor.

Teena Halbig, Vice President of the UNA Kentucky Division, was a driving force in getting other partners interested in Play Ball Puerto Rico, including the UNA Frankfort, Bluegrass/Lexington, Louisville, and Puerto Rico chapters, and the Louisville Mayor's Office of Globalization. She did an excellent job linking the vision of Play Ball Puerto Rico to several of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Her dedicated service made all the difference in the success of PBPR's first project.

To date, PBPR has raised funding to support the renovation of three youth baseball fields on the Island. Our first project occurred in the community of Aguadilla, in the northwest region of Puerto Rico. Officials from Aguadilla's baseball league submitted a proposal to PBPR that included a Project Narrative (mission and goals statement, scope of work, timeline and methods for

evaluation) along with a detailed budget with itemized costs. There was strict accountability and transparency throughout the whole project, which will also occur for all future projects.

As part of its effort to develop good citizens through baseball, PBPR, under the direction of Ricardo Arzuaga Chaves, Executive Director of the UNA Puerto Rico Chapter, worked with the young players, their coaches, and their parents to organize and implement a service-learning project in the community. The young players worked hard to identify a project that would have both positive impact and high visibility.

They decided to undertake a beach beautification project that brought together local businesses, nonprofit organizations and government officials who worked with the young players to accomplish a very successful one day project. Several baseball players from the University of Puerto Rico also pitched in their time which made a powerful impression on the young players. This will be an annual event!

BEFORE



AFTER



These pictures are of the completely renovated ball field and of the beach beautification project attest to the success of our project in Aquadilla. We invite more UNA-USA chapters and divisions and interested parties who want to participate in these efforts to help young people and this humanitarian project. [Learn how you can support PBPR here](#). View the television story where

you can meet Lawson, Bernie and youths you can help. You can also donate, and consider a chapter fundraiser, too.

And we are nowhere near finished! With its current funding, PBPR plans to support field renovations in two more communities on the Island, accompanied by service-learning projects that involve the young baseball players along with community and corporate partners. However, funds are needed for t-shirts or uniforms, baseball hats, and other items, so please consider financial assistance. Let us know if you want to be a sponsor.

This entire set of projects is summarized wonderfully by Jaime Torres, President of our partner organization (ACOPAR) in Puerto Rico:

The goal of The American Congress of Puerto Rico (ACOPUR) baseball program is to develop not only good baseball players but also good citizens.