

# Port Arthur nets new basketball court

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PORT ARTHUR — After being hit by one hardship after another, the city of Port Arthur has received a gift of hope.

Dozens of people came out to Bryan Park on Saturday to celebrate and witness the unveiling of the community's new basketball court.

The refurbished orange and blue court was donated by Sparkling Ice, which sorted through more than a dozen nominations for U.S. cities that had experienced devastation.

"We are in the process right now of what I like to call a revitalization of our city," Port Arthur Mayor Thurman Bill Bartie told The Enterprise on Saturday. "To have ... Sparkling Ice do an investment such as this into our community speaks volumes about their product. But it also allows the citizens to have a feeling of worth in that someone would put something of this great value right here."

"... This is phenomenal ... it's like the Christmas gift that keeps on giving," he later added.

The city was nominated by the wife of former NFL football player and Port Arthur native Jordan Babineaux, which ultimately led to The Sparkling Ice Basketball Court unveiling.

"In these turbulent times of anxiety, fear and anticipation, now more than ever is the time for us to come together, unite, create impact and provide and leave a better legacy for our next generation of kids and future leaders," said Babineaux, whose wife was not in attendance but is part of the Sparkling Ice marketing team.

Sparkling Ice project manager Nicole Milazzo said the drink company prides itself on bringing communities together and creating moments of positivity and celebration for all ages.

She said Sparkling Ice kicked off the "Cheers to You Beautification Project" last year with that very goal in mind when it partnered with the three selected U.S. cities — including for playgrounds in Lumberton, North Carolina and Biloxi, Mississippi — to revitalize areas where the towns' residents gathered the most.

"After learning more about the hurricanes that have destroyed this part of Port Arthur, we found that there was an opportunity to restore this basketball court right here at Bryan Court..." Milazzo said

In addition to the new court, Sparkling Ice plans in 2022 to add a new playground, picnic tables, swings, and benches for the community to enjoy the park located at 1000 Gulfway Dr.

Off the football field, now standing center court, Babineaux fought back emotions as he reflected on his hometown — the hardships its experienced and the joy Saturday's unveiling brought.

"It's always good to be home," Babineaux said before taking a long, hard pause.

"There is just a certain type of energy when I come home," Babineaux continued. "I need it. And y'all give it to me. Y'all may not know it, but I'm always watching. I'm curious about what's happening in my city."

Babineaux, who now lives in Seattle, was grateful for Sparkling Ice's investment in Port Arthur, which he said, "will continue to persevere through hard times, good times, ups and downs."

"This city made me," he said. "It raised me. It taught me a lot about life, a lot about perseverance and resilience. Y'all guys are a resilient group and don't let anybody tell you

different. We can go anywhere in the country, anywhere in the world and we can adapt, and we can thrive, and we are going to win.”

Following his nearly decade-long NFL career, Babineaux has transitioned into a sports broadcaster, entrepreneur, business leader and international bestselling author of *Pivot to Win: Make the Big Plays in Life, Sports & Business*.

“When I first heard about it, it was super exciting because it felt like it was a way to bring the community together, certainly having experienced what we have all been through over the last 18 months,” Babineaux told *The Enterprise*. “A project like this can bring new life and spark new energy. I hope it inspires others to come out and play and enjoy the park and maybe create new habits, new routines, new love for the revitalization of this particular park.”

Aside from the new court, Port Arthur Director of Parks and Recreation Chandra Alpough noted there also are plans for other revitalization projects, including repairs to the city’s various parks including Rose Hill and Adams.

“We will just tackle each park as we can ... do a needs assessment ... and then we are going to sit down and do the repairs one park at a time,” Alpough said.

Following the ribbon cutting, the community sat in the stands and cheered on as players went toe-to-toe for the win.

The Port Arthur Independent School District has taken home 10 state championship basketball titles, with the most recent win by Memorial High School during the 2017-18 season.

Port Arthur resident Sydney Keel, 44, played on the old state championship team in 1995 and participated in the tournament on Saturday.

“Without courts like this, there wouldn’t have been championships won,” Keel said before heading back out to his team on the new court.

Babineaux looked at the community shortly before the start of the new court’s first tournament with eight teams vying under new hoops with tempered glass backboards.

“Many of you know me from growing up on the west side of Port Arthur, young, bad,” Babineaux said with a laugh. “But I figured something out. I figured something out and one of the things I am inspired to do now is to share it — those attributes, those skills, those lessons, those things that I was taught growing up in these times and growing up in the city that I hope to share with other people.”

“I hope in some way the things that I am doing to inspire others to help build community and to create impact also inspires the next generation,” he added as he thanked everyone involved, including Saturday’s players. “... Let’s play ball.”