Pitching In For Kids' Baseball

I arrived at work Thursday and a guy was parked out front waiting for me, his Volvo packed to the gills with baseball gear. It’s been that way for the past week for the struggling Roberto Clemente League, which serves 500 Hartford kids, from age 5 to 16.

A week ago, I told you about how financial mismanagement had led to a police investigation, with the league tens of thousands of dollars in debt and the entire program in danger of folding. Now, the league’s supporters are living up to its namesake, Roberto Clemente, a gifted Puerto Rican ballplayer remembered as much for his humanitarian work as his all-star talent.

“It kind of caught me off guard,” said league President Efrain Bracero, a burly warehouse worker whose cellphone exploded with more than 80 calls from Courant readers offering to help. When Bracero took over the league in February, he found a pile of debt and an empty bank account. Then, when he went looking for the league’s equipment, he discovered that it had been auctioned off because nobody paid the storage locker bill.

We found each other on Facebook and I wrote a column. But the story is about different worlds connecting, and perhaps the power of the spirit of Roberto Clemente.

“I appreciate all the help. I thank them dearly,” said Bracero. “It means a lot to the city of Hartford as well as to the kids.”

There were calls from a representative with Major League Baseball, another guy connected to the Yankees, state legislators, a prominent lawyer who promised a large donation, but most significantly, regular folks from throughout the Hartford area who responded to a call for help.

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