

Baseball and softball equipment store to open indoor training facility at Midlink Business Park

Published: Monday, November 22, 2010, 4:46 PM Updated: Tuesday, November 23, 2010, 7:48 AM



Alex Nixon | Kalamazoo Gazette



Kalamazoo Gazette file

A section of the front of the Midlink Business Park, on Sprinkle Road in Comstock Township, is shown in this July 15 file photo.

COMSTOCK TOWNSHIP — A company that sells baseball and softball equipment will expand with a new space at the Midlink Business Park and will offer the region's first indoor practice field.

Softball Fans Inc., which runs an online store and has a small store in Portage, has signed a lease for 34,000 square feet in Midlink, according to a press release from the business park's owners.

The new space, expected to open around Jan. 1, will have a 19,000-square-foot training area that includes pitching lanes, six batting cages, and a full practice infield for off-season indoor practice for universities and amateur teams.

"There isn't a training facility (like this) in the Southwest Michigan area," said Bryan Knoll, owner of Softball Fans.

Knoll said there's a lot of demand for an indoor practice space in Southwest Michigan.

"West Michigan has needed a quality facility for some time, and, together with our retail offering we should be able to fully serve all avid baseball and softball players in this area," he said.

The space also will include 3,500 square feet of retail space, corporate offices and warehouse space. Knoll declined to say how much the company is spending to build out the space.

Privately held Softball Fans, which launched in 2004, is the largest online retailer of high-end softball and baseball equipment, Knoll said.

Sales through the company's website, softballfans.com,



has been the company's primary source of revenue, Knoll said. But with more retail space at Midlink, plus additional traffic from the training center should drive more sales from the bricks-and-mortar shop, he said.

Midlink Business Park in Comstock Township is seen from the air in this 2006 photo.

"The retail will be dramatically ramped up," he said.

Softball Fans has been growing steadily, even during the last several years of recession. Knoll said growth has been possible because the company has customers around the world and because it's a niche business.

"We specialize in the tournament level player. All our product is on the high end," he said. "We've done well here. We expect that to continue."



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The company employs 14 people now and could expand once the new facility opens, he said. The retail operation will be in the Midlink West building, facing Sprinkle Road.

Midlink Business Park is a multi-tenant mixed-use development at the site of a former General Motors stamping plant in Comstock Township. It includes 1.6 million square feet of space in two buildings, plus open space for additional developments.