

# Event marks groundbreaking for new Glendale ballpark

**Carrie Watters**

The Arizona Republic

Nov. 19, 2007 03:08 PM

There is more to be done on a complex deal, but Monday was a day to celebrate baseball and the newest additions to spring training in Maricopa County: the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Chicago White Sox.

"I'm 18 years old again," said Dodgers fan Jon Thompson, 59, who drove down from Sedona to soak in the revelry as ground officially broke on Glendale's spring training stadium.

"That's probably the greatest thing that ever happened," Peoria resident Jerry Kimmel said after Vin Scully signed his baseball. Kimmel and his wife were off next scouting for the governor.

Scully, the team's 57-year announcer, was master of ceremonies for a program with a slate of dignitaries including Gov. Janet Napolitano.

"We really want Arizona to be the baseball and softball capital of the world," said Napolitano, who tossed her support to landing the Dodgers.

The Dodgers, who shook up the sporting world nearly 50 years ago with a move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, had continued to train at Dodgertown in Vero Beach, Fla.

That should change in 2009 when Glendale opens its 13,000-seat ballpark.

The city has 15 months to complete the project, so dirt started moving last month. Dodgers owner Frank McCourt on Monday characterized the timeline as "manageably aggressive."

McCourt said the timeline should be firmed up next month and that he would give Vero Beach the final word on whether the Dodgers leave for Arizona on schedule or hold off for the 2010 season.

White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf said he expects his team to be playing at the ballpark in 2009, although holdups for the Sox involve more than construction.

The Sox are under contract with Pima County to play at Tucson Electric Park through 2012, which means the Sox must find a replacement team if they want to leave early.

"We expect to work things out with Tucson," Reinsdorf said when asked about a replacement team.

The governor said she is working with Tucson, which must maintain three ball clubs or risk losing spring training altogether.

"We're going to see if we can make this a win-win for everybody," Napolitano said.

In 2000, Maricopa County had just seven Major League clubs in its spring league, while Tucson had three. With the passage of a proposition to create the Arizona Sports & Tourism Authority, which uses a tourism tax in the county to support sports, the Valley should top 12 teams in 2009.

The sports authority will contribute two-thirds of the funding for Glendale's \$80.7 million ballpark. The city expects to generate its third of the funding with sales taxes and other revenues from more than 500 acres near the ballpark being developed by Rightpath Development.

The ballpark, at Camelback Road and 111th Avenue, is actually on Glendale-owned land in Phoenix. The two cities are still detailing plans to pay for infrastructure and split revenues.

The saying has always been that one must wear Dodgers blue to get into heaven, but Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon joked Monday that he earned his passage with the "near miracle" of two cities working together.

But the fans who flocked to Monday's event were there for baseball, not politics or revenue-sharing.

Dodger fan Hector Mercado, pushing his young son in a stroller, was simply thrilled to get his baseball signed by Scully and Dodgers Spanish language announcer Jaime Jarrin.

Well, that and soon having the Dodgers play just five minutes from his Avondale home

As McCourt said, "Spring training is true Americana. It's the excitement for new beginnings, new hopes and new heroes."