

## In writing history of Target Field, don't forget about Bruce Lambrecht

Standing on his so-called Rapid Park site behind Target Center, Bruce Lambrecht had a stadium dream, but wound up being called greedy in the process. He's standing where he thought home plate should be located



By Jeff Wheeler, Star Tribune



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Long before the crowds and the hoopla surrounding the new Twins stadium, before the excitement and the accolades, before Joe Mauer's first hit in the new house or Francisco Liriano's first strikeout, a guy stood alone in a parking lot and saw it all.

At first people called him crazy, and kicked him out of meetings. They said the space was too small for baseball. They said the location wasn't accessible. They noted it was next to a garbage burner.

Later, when they changed their minds, the guy, Bruce Lambrecht, became a pariah. He was called "greedy," a hypocrite and an impediment to a new ballpark.

When you sit in the stands and see the skyline down the right field line, you'll see that Lambrecht was right: It's a nice spot to watch guys chase baseballs. But Lambrecht probably won't be throwing out the first pitch anytime soon. In fact, his name has not even been mentioned amid all the stadium praise.

But Mark Oyaas, a founder of New Ballpark Inc. and a big stadium booster, is one of those who like to call Lambrecht "the forgotten man."

You can decide whether he should be or not.

Lambrecht was the lead owner of the land where the stadium now sits. He and a group of about 70 investors bought the land back in the 1980s and sat on it. It was a sunken piece of turf that he used as a parking lot. But he had a vision, and over the course of many years he kept pushing it on anybody who would listen.

Continued Next Page

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Lambrecht even brought in architects from HOK Sport Inc., which eventually got the contract to design Target Field, and sold them on the lot. He persuaded Dave Albersman, a local architect, to draw up plans, which Lambrecht toted around to meetings.

"I saw the lot and I said, 'Bruce, this is killer. It's got everything.'"

But at first people rolled their eyes and dismissed Lambrecht. One of my esteemed colleagues began to call the location "Bruce's ditch."

"It's a great little story about somebody who wasn't ordained to build a stadium actually getting it done through sheer perseverance," said Albersman. "At the exhibition game, some of the people taking credit for it were some of the same people who said it didn't stand a chance."

Gradually, however, the buzzwords that gained traction were "compact, transit-oriented, neighborhood ballpark," and to the geniuses fighting for a new field, Bruce's ditch began to look like a field of dreams. The Northstar line and Hiawatha LRT converged near his land, and the political and financial forces finally came together. The Legislature passed a site-specific bill in 2006.

That's when Lambrecht, who had been pushing the site since 2000, became the bad guy. An appraiser hired by Hennepin County valued the land at \$17 million. Lambrecht, however, had the audacity to try to get the most out of the property for his investors, and asked for \$65 million. An ugly battle ended in a court settlement about midway between, just as it should have.

Lambrecht made a tidy profit, but in the process his reputation took the hit, and now he's the invisible man behind the stadium every baseball fan loves.

Like Oyaas and Albersman, I don't begrudge him the money. You get the best price you can, no matter who your buyer is.

But Lambrecht's politics -- he's a strong anti-tax guy opposed to public handouts who suddenly became a fan of them -- undoubtedly played a part in the animosity.

"That killed him," said Albersman. "I've become good friends with Bruce, and I'm a liberal and I still tease him about it."

Still, Albersman thinks Lambrecht deserves some credit for getting the stadium built, and so does Oyaas.

"Just as we provide ode to the Twins' Jerry Bell for perseverance at the State Capitol, and Mike Opat's courage at the County Board, so too should we honor Lambrecht's vision for an urban ballpark that takes advantage of existing infrastructure and a neighborhood already built for entertainment," said Oyaas. "His wildest ballpark dreams are reality, but in jeopardy of being lost to history."

# *'Forgotten Man' in development of new Twins Park is NUHS Graduate 1968*

*By Herb Schaper, Editor  
POSTED April 13, 2010 New Ulm Sports Central*



Bruce Lambrecht, 1968 New Ulm High School graduate, has been featured in two recent Twin Cities newspaper articles relating to the development of Target Park, the new home of the Minnesota Twins.

Bruce is the son of Art and Marlys Lambrecht of New Ulm (KDB) and brother of Tim (KDB) and Duane Lambrecht (Shelter Products) of New Ulm and sisters Marsha Belter and Kay Zibrowski. Marsha resides in Glencoe while serving as business manager for the Hopkins school districts. Kay lives in Eagan.

Bruce graduated from University of Minnesota before entering the business world in the metro area.

The articles appearing Tuesday, April 13 in the Minneapolis Tribune and on the website Minnpost.com Friday, April 9 relate his role as the visionary who campaigned long ago for the placement of the park in the present location. It is on Bruce's former land property that the new park eventually was constructed.

Tuesday's article features a picture taken with Bruce standing on where home plate was expected to go. It's been more than a dozen years since he envisioned the park and a long time a-coming before his dreams were taken seriously.

Even the family had some doubts. Duane recalls a Thanksgiving gathering in New Ulm that concluded with Bruce bringing out all sorts of architect sketches of his vision. "We told him he was nuts then", remarks

Duane. That was about a dozen years ago.

His dream always was to have the park flanked by the Minneapolis skyline explains Duane. To encourage that thinking, he flew in a famous architect to make some preliminary drawings and plans to see if it was possible. The architect did say it would work but with "a lot of work".

Bruce is Duane's younger brother by four years and was a real estate developer and broker when the idea of the land becoming the stadium site came up. Prior to that he was a business turn-around specialist.

He has not featured in the opening of the park largely because he turned a major profit on the sale of the land for the park to be financed by tax money. He was an activist against government handouts to private business at the time.

At one point, recalls Duane, he was told he should "donate the land" to the project. Bruce indicated he would wait for owner Carl Pollad to donate the team to the state of Minnesota first.

A website which involves contributions from former Minneapolis journalists, featured some of his new projects in an article.

Both articles are reproduced as attachments to the Tuesday, April 13 report on the publications.

*(Ed. Note: This quality article as posted April 9 on the MinnPost.com news website. The role of Bruce Lambrecht, former New Ulm resident, in the development of Target Field, is documented in the final third of the article.*

## Target Field: Economic impact is years -- and dreams -- away

By Jay Weiner | Friday, April 9, 2010

As the official opening of Target Field dawns on Monday, critics skeptical of the "economic impact" of stadiums can easily argue that they are winning the day.

So far, all anyone can point to as a result of the new \$555 million Twins ballpark is a convenience store/gas station at Fifth Street North and Sixth Avenue North, and a handful of replacement restaurants and bars springing up along First Avenue near the ballpark. In many cases, these "new" enterprises represent classic examples of transferred — not new — economic activity in the region, the sort of "moving the chips on the table" scenario so long blasted by stadium subsidy opponents.

Hubert's, which was the singular Metrodome-linked watering hole, has added a site in Target Center, across the street from the ballpark. Hubert's Dome customers will simply move their dollars to the Target Field location, which is replacing another sports-bar/restaurant that was once there. Kieran's Irish Pub, which was located a few blocks away in downtown Minneapolis, has taken the place of Bellanotte, which went out of business in Block E. Roy Smalley's Club 87, a new restaurant, has set up in the former Champps in Butler Square.

Is that all there will be? Of course not, and given the current economy, Mike Christenson, Minneapolis director of community planning and economic development, expressed a certain level of glee even with that limited activity.

The big question for developers, city and Hennepin County officials and the Twins is how much will follow? The answer, and not a satisfactory one, is: Time will tell. Lots of time.

Will Target Field generate or nudge massive economic activity in the so-called North Loop? Could it ride a wave of ancillary development?

It all depends ... on how you define economic activity, and on whether your period of assessment demands instant gratification, or your horizon carries patience and realism. It also depends on the development of an intermodal transit exchange that, some say, could be the real engine for change around the ballpark.

### What we know so far

The first official American League regular season game has yet to be played. Already, the existence of the facility has created a palpable excitement that City Council Member Lisa Goodman, a critic of subsidies to sports facilities, acknowledges has value ... although probably not equal to the \$350 million of Hennepin County-backed public financing.

Goodman, in whose ward Target Field sits, said, "It's great from a civic pride perspective."

We know the Twins are expected to attract about 3 million customers this season, and likely for the next couple of seasons, to a section of downtown Minneapolis that was once known only for surface parking lots tucked next to what many derisively call "the garbage burner." (More on that later.) We know the team is marketing the suites and clubs in the stadium for conferences, weddings and other social events to keep it somewhat active during the off-season. Already, the stadium is [a destination for mere curiosity-seekers](#), even when the Twins aren't playing.

As downtown developer Chuck Leer of North First Ventures told MinnPost: "There is a euphoria from doing something right as a city, as a county and as a state. That's going to give some lift" to the area around the ballpark. It is difficult to argue against community spirit in the urban setting in the throes of this Great Recession. What's it worth? Unknown.

(But failed Block E on Hennepin Avenue and a short walk Target Field is [in the process of being sold](#) and its buyer has cited the arrival of the ballpark.)

We also know that the ballpark has been designed — with a plaza extending toward the heart of downtown — to encourage people to come early, hang around and leave later. The Target Plaza gathering place has been established — with private dollars from the Twins and Target, by the way — linking downtown to the north side. That's good for city life.

We know that, unlike the Metrodome, Target Field was placed in an area that already had some sizable economic activity — the Warehouse District — and another sports and entertainment facility — Target Center. Some housing already has been developed nearby.

But we also know that the economy remains in the tank, and that the credit markets continue to be unkind to developers.

"Target Field has opened at an absolutely terrible time for ancillary development," said Steve Berg, a Twin Cities journalist and urbanologist, whose book "Target Field: The Minnesota Twins' New Home," will be published this summer.

And if any developer is expecting to get subsidies from the city any time soon to jump-start development near Target Field, they should think again. As Council Member Goodman said, "I believe many people think the Twins ballpark was the subsidy" to boost development.

We also know that as communities around the country have financed and funded stadiums and arenas over the past 15 years, there has been — for at least one noted urban scholar — an evolution of thought about the benefits of such projects. To wit, University of Michigan Professor Mark Rosentraub wrote a book in 1997 called "Major League Losers," in which he argued against subsidies to team owners and questioned the value of public funding for sports facilities.

This year, he wrote a new book, "Major League Winners," detailing how in some communities — San Diego, Cleveland and Indianapolis, for example — thoughtful "investments" by government have succeeded.

Noting that his ideas have evolved, Rosentraub wrote in an email to MinnPost: "It is agreed that sports by itself adds only a little to a regional economy in terms of its individual and direct impact (the value of a team). This is because in the absence of a team, people still spend money for recreation, leaving the regional economy almost neutral. What does change, however, is the location of that spending. For example, having a team in a downtown area or in a declining central city or where public officials want it located MOVES regional economic spending to a specific location."

We also know that the conditions and visions affiliated with Target Field are very different from those that were attached to the Metrodome, which has long been offered up as Prime Exhibit One for the skeptics' case of "stadiums do nothing" for a surrounding community. The Dome's sad ancillary development history is filled with myth. When it was built, city fathers didn't really have a development plan. Their instincts were to bring the Twins and Vikings from Bloomington — the burgeoning 1970s suburbs — to the core city, more as a symbol than a development trigger.

## **A new urban ballpark**

At this point in history, the Target Field location is significantly more advantageous than the Dome's was 30 years ago. It wasn't dropped down, as if a spaceship landed on the edge of nowhere, tucked behind a hospital and parking lots. It's attached to an existing entertainment district and to plans.

There are those who say that a neighborhood with 81 baseball games and noisy trains won't be the most attractive for housing. Others don't agree. There are those who say Minneapolis' central business district is filled with vacant office space and empty hotel rooms, and we won't need more for a long while.

But most of the optimism that surrounds Target Field stems from the related mass transit piece of this ballpark, and a rarely mentioned energy component.

For their part, Twins officials are not overselling the impact of the stadium. Their narrative of the ballpark driving "economic impact" changed a long time ago. The team's chief spokesman during the Twins stadium lobbying, Jerry Bell, listened to the "economic impact" critics, and his argument migrated to preserving Major League Baseball in Minnesota and to retaining a state-wide cultural asset. Still, Twins officials in their actions, according to government officials, have revealed a keen understanding of the relationship between the stadium, mass transit and environmental issues.

A driving force behind rail's link to the ballpark and the district is Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin. The interchange he is promoting includes the Central Corridor Light Rail, the current Hiawatha line, the just-opened Northstar commuter line, the fast train to Chicago and other LRT and commuter train lines all leading to the Target Field station. Thousands of bus trips a day end at garages nearby. Parking ramps are in place nearby. The Cedar Lake Bike Trail is planned to [go along there](#).

Some folks have already taken to calling it "the Grand Central Station" of Minneapolis. On the white board in his Government Center office, McLaughlin has hand-drawn tracks and dates that suggest a completion date for all of this rail activity by 2020.

"Those train lines coming together are a very, very powerful attraction for investment," McLaughlin said.

They would bring suburbanites in for work and pleasure, a chance to enjoy a city they might otherwise fear. They would allow city dwellers to travel throughout the urban core, and beyond. They would reduce automobile traffic.

"Rail investments keep the center the center," McLaughlin said, and right next to it is the region's newest amenity, the ballpark and one of its arenas, Target Center, not to mention an entertainment district a short walk away.

Retail has been ceded to the suburbs. Forget about that attracting people to the core. Core cities, as Rosentraub points out in "Major League Winners," are the locations for "unique activities" that can't exist anywhere else in a region. Sports and culture are among those fewer and fewer unique activities.

## Visions

Then, there are the grand visions related to the trains and the games. To understand one, you need to go up on the roof of an aging mini-storage warehouse at the corner of Third Avenue North and Fifth Street North and dream with Bruce Lambrecht. Eleven years ago, lots of people called Lambrecht names worse than dreamer when he told his business partner Rich Pogin that a Twins ballpark could and should be built on a parking lot tucked to the north and west of the I-394 entryway into downtown. It became the site for the Twins ballpark.

With that deal done, Lambrecht and other partners still control another tight piece of land adjacent to that "Grand Central Station" location. Now, as he stands on that warehouse roof, the Target Field bull's-eye stares at him and the ballpark rises as a shining monument to perseverance, deal-making, a new sales tax and various levels of profit.

Lambrecht and his nearly 100 partners collected more than \$28 million for the land, the Twins franchise value was tagged at \$405 million this week by Forbes magazine (up 14 percent over last year) and team ticket prices [went up 45 percent](#), the largest increase in the Major Leagues this season.

He has a vision that encompasses both the baseball and rail assets in his backyard. On this site, he envisions a 35-story "sports and entertainment condominium" development, with 11 floors adding 254 hotel rooms on the bottom and 20 stories adding 185 condos on the top. From the windows of those southwest facing condos, an owner would be sitting just beyond and just above the left field stands, and could gaze into the ballpark.

Hotel guests would have instant access to the stadium, and a concierge service would aid them with tickets to events. On non-game nights at Target Field, in Lambrecht's vision, hotel guests and condo owners would hop on light rail trains and head to downtown St. Paul for a Wild game or to the University of Minnesota campus for an event. Or simply stroll downtown. Or take a family on a bike ride on the Cedar Trail.

Extreme? Impossible?

"It might sound extreme," Lambrecht said, "but so did a ballpark on eight acres of land next to a garbage burner 11 years ago."

### A long view

Can that happen? Should that happen? Lambrecht's is not the only big idea. Twins Inc. President Jerry Bell takes a visitor on a tour of the stadium and looks at the same plot of land and imagines a 40-story office tower, with workers from all over the region arriving there via trains.

There is the possibility of something growing out of the Seventh Street side of the ballpark, where a players' parking lot now sits. The Twins own the air rights over that lot.

Housing is a possibility moving out from the stadium towards the neighborhoods along the Mississippi River to the north and east, probably through refurbished warehouse space. The future of North Minneapolis could be linked to the transit hub.

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The Hennepin Energy Recovery Center — known as the "garbage burner" — could also be a key component to development. Developer Leer calls the ballpark, the rail hub and HERC's energy piece an example of "harmonic convergence." HERC could serve to create energy for the entire district as it grows, he said.

For now, all of those ideas — good and bad — are non-starters because of the economy. For now, the talk of housing is muffled because the condo market will need to shake out over the next three to five years, as already built units are sold and new demand grows, demand driven by the transit hub, by the energy on the streets because of the ballpark and Target Center, because of more people coming downtown, because of the aging population of the suburbs.

An indication of the longer view that needs to be taken can be seen in the renaming of an activist ad hoc group of urban lovers, developers, city boosters and business leaders that Leer chairs. Formed a few years back to begin envisioning the growth around the ballpark, it was called the 2010 Partners.

But recently, the group changed its name. It is now the 2020 Partners. That's a decade down this uncertain road.

By then, McLaughlin's white board might be a clear slate, with all the train lines operating. By then, another Lambrecht project might have shocked the community. By then, the optimists hope, Target Field will be one piece of a successful urban pie, not the centerpiece, or the only piece, not merely a magnet for a transferred restaurant here or a relocated bar there.

MinnPost photo by Jay Weiner  
With Northstar commuter line trains below him, the hoped-for site of Minnesota's own "Grand Central Station," Bruce Lambrecht gazes at what could be.



Illustration courtesy of Dennis J. Sutliff,  
Elness Swenson Graham Architects, Inc.

A dream, or the next phase? Land owner and developer Bruce Lambrecht envisions a 35-story "sports and entertainment" hotel and condominium project on Fifth Street North, just beyond left field of Target Field, directly