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Gus Macker tournament coming to Racine

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RACINE - Kristin Cafferty was in Sheboygan, but her mind was on Racine.

Cafferty couldn't help but get wrapped up in a Gus Macker basketball tournament last July while watching her son, Jake, participate in the event.

There were thousands of people wandering the premises in a festival-like setting.

"It was just so much fun," Cafferty said. "I thought it would be great to have something like this for Racine.

"I thought it would be great exposure for the city and it could help Racine Youth Sports."

When Cafferty returned to work as a lawyer at Habush Habush & Rottier, she shared her Gus Macker tournament experience with Steve Botzau, her law partner and member of the RYS

board of directors.

Cafferty posed the idea of bringing a Gus Macker tournament to Racine and noted how it could have wide-ranging benefits for the city and RYS, a non-profit organization.

Botzau embraced Cafferty's suggestion, setting off a series of discussions with local leaders and Gus Macker officials.

The seeds Cafferty planted will come to fruition Aug. 21-22 when Racine holds its first Gus Macker tournament on the lakefront behind Gateway Technical College and in Monument Square in downtown Racine.

Thirty one temporary basketball courts will be constructed between the two locations, with tournament action running from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. each day.

Each team in the 3-on-3 tournament is guaranteed a minimum of three games. Players' ages range from 8-68.

"When she (Cafferty) told me about it, she was so enthusiastic about it," Botzau said. "It sounded like a great idea. I then talked to Joe Mooney (his co-chairman) and it all started to come together."

While the Gus Macker tournament will revolve around basketball, organizers are planning other family-oriented activities.

There will be food and merchandise vendors, along with contests and music.

"We're hoping this becomes a big community event," Botzau said. "We're hoping it becomes as popular as Party on the Pavement.

"I think it'll attract a real cross section of people and bring this community together."

Gus Macker tournaments have been held for almost four decades across the United States, including several in Wisconsin.

Wausau has hosted Gus Macker tournaments for 20 years and expects to have nearly 900 teams this summer.

That is a significant number, although it pales in comparison to the Gus Macker tournament record of 5,000 teams, set in 1997 in Belding, Mich.

Racine tournament organizers don't have any illusions of attracting that many teams, but they have established a lofty first-year goal.

"We'd like to get about 300 teams," Botzau said. "That's a good, modest goal for us."

Mike Fuller, a Gus Macker events manager who was in Racine earlier this week to help promote the event said inaugural Macker events usually draw about 200 teams.

Fuller, who has spent 20 years working for Gus Macker and has overseen countless tournaments, said he's been impressed by the efforts of Racine organizers.

"They've just done an awesome job of putting this together," said Fuller, who was here with the Gus Macker Road Show. "It's very well-organized and they have worked very hard on this. It should be a great event."