

## STEVE CRAMER, MBA BOARD CHAIR



Minnesota Ballpark Authority Chair Steve Cramer

One day years ago, when Steve Cramer was a boy in Dubuque, Iowa, he was so determined not to miss a single minute of the 1965 World Series between the Minnesota Twins and the L.A. Dodgers that he sprinted for home the instant the school bell rang. Unfortunately, he was blind-sided by a car and ended up in the emergency room with minor injuries. On the bright side, Cramer says, "The game was still on when I got home a short while later."

Cramer's youthful capacity for enthusiasm remains, but any tendency towards the headlong rush is definitely a thing of the past. With decades of community and economic development experience under his belt, Cramer is a man who has mastered the art of the thoughtful, measured approach. It's a skill that's come in handy during his tenure at the helm of the Minnesota Ballpark Authority's board of commissioners, where his steady guidance has been a welcome contribution to the project.

Since 2003, Cramer has been the president and executive director of Project for Pride in Living (PPL), a nonprofit that provides housing and job training support to lower-income people working toward self-sufficiency. No stranger to the public sector, Cramer served on the Minneapolis City Council from 1984 to 1993, and spent parts of the following decade in leadership roles at the Minneapolis Community Development Agency and Hennepin County Community Works. While at the MCDA, Cramer was involved in the early phases of the Hiawatha LRT system and also worked on redevelopment of the Sears tower at the intersection of Chicago and Lake in south Minneapolis.

Although he's still an avid Twins fan, Cramer sees his work with the Ballpark Authority as much more deeply tied to his lifelong passion for community development. He is quick to point out that everyone—from the County, to his fellow board members, to the Twins—agrees that the ballpark is about more than just the game. "While building a wonderful place to play major league baseball is absolutely the priority, we also want to see that this half-billion dollar investment will have a positive economic benefit to the community," says Cramer. As part of that, the Ballpark Authority is on track to achieve some very aggressive goals for workforce and business participation through its Community Participation Program.

Cramer understood from the beginning that such goals can't be met in a vacuum. Under his leadership, the Ballpark Authority has built relationships with job training and business development groups that work with women and minorities. "The theory was that if we are going to set aggressive goals that Mortenson [Construction] would ultimately be held responsible for achieving, then the least we could do was to try to introduce resources that would help them get there," explains Cramer.

Within the constraints of a tightly managed budget, Cramer and the rest of the Board have also lent concrete support to other mandates, including the legislature's wish that the new ballpark become a regional flagship for green design and construction. The Board allocated \$1 million from its interest income on bond proceeds toward the costs of meeting the LEED program's environmental standards. "We're trying to put our money where our mouth is . . . and keep the focus on achieving that goal," says Cramer.

Cramer is also a staunch advocate for the district enhancements that will help to spur the surrounding area's eventual transformation into an exciting new neighborhood. After funding for enhancements fell victim to higher land acquisition costs, the Board allocated another \$1 million of its discretionary funds to an incentive program that encourages other public entities and developers to chip in for things like public art, signage, and pedestrian amenities.

Cramer knows that a full-scale ballpark district is a long time coming, but says it's vitally important to plan for

it now. "Obviously, we need to get the ballpark in place, but we also want to make decisions that are supportive of future development--not in a two or three-year time frame, but on a ten and thirty-year time horizon," he says. Cramer's deep experience in community development helps him to take the long view. "When it comes to urban development, patience is a virtue," he observes. "You have to have a vision and a long-term plan and just keep at it." He points to the Minneapolis riverfront as an example, where a transformation that sometimes seems to have sprung up overnight was actually the result of decades of planning and effort.

Happily, one need not wait so long to start reaping benefits from the hard work and careful planning by Steve Cramer and so many others involved with the ballpark. In just 18 months, fans will begin streaming to the ballpark for the opening pitch. And when they arrive, Steve Cramer is confident that they will be pleased with what they find. "Whether you are a suite club holder or the guy with the \$10 ticket, the objective is that you have a great experience at the new ballpark," promises Cramer.