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Baseball series a boost to county New Pullman Park pays dividends

When the National Club Baseball Association Division II World Series comes to Butler's Pullman Park this week, it will be the first of a number of events attracted by Butler County's sport resources.

"A lot of the NCBA teams are going to be bringing their families, and some fans, from around the country," said Jack Cohen, executive director of the county Tourism and Convention Bureau.

Each of the eight teams in the series that runs from Friday to May 19 has about a 25-player roster. That adds up to a number of hotel rooms, restaurant visits and car rentals, Cohen said.

According to Kenny Rayl, director of the tournament, each team may travel with up to 100 people who are friends and family of the players.

The Butler Days Inn in Butler Township will house all of the ball players, and has taken in its fair share of fans, as well.

"I didn't even have room for all of the parents. I wish I had these kinds of events every week," said Rene Connor, director of sales for the Butler Days Inn.

All of its 142 rooms are full next weekend, more than 50 of them with ball players. Another 50 rooms are for participants in another sporting event, the Pepsi Youth Bowling Championships, and the rest for fans.

The series teams are: Penn State; Hofstra; the University of Kentucky; Virginia Commonwealth; Coastal Carolina; Southern Illinois University- Carbondale; Lone Star College -Kingwood, and the University of Wyoming.

Natili's Restaurant downtown, Frisco's at the Days Inn and the Monroe Hotel each plan to host a team night, in which players are invited to eat and mingle.

The tournament was put out for bid about a year and a half ago, and Pullman Park attracted event promoters.

"If we do things right, there's lots of opportunities for us," Cohen said. "We're becoming a player now, and starting to see the economic development we can bring to Butler County."

The club association teams will practice at the Highfield baseball diamonds on Duffy Road when not competing at Pullman.

"So far, everything has gone great. The teams are excited to be playing in a new ballpark," Rayl said of renovated Pullman Park.

A Pittsburgh native, Rayl played some of his high school baseball in Butler.

"I played in old Pullman Park, and since it was refurbished, it is a totally different

venue. I am really impressed," he said.

Cohen said the NCBA World Series is just the tip of the iceberg, though. Some of the sports facilities in the county will become venues for other events later on.

"We've actually booked some other events already that are four years away," Cohen said.

While he said those events cannot be announced until their promoters approve, Cohen said some will pump several million dollars into the county economy.

Pullman Park is bringing in some activities.

It will be the home field this summer for the Butler BlueSox in the team's inaugural 2009 Prospect League season. It also will host several Elite Championship Baseball tournaments this summer.

And fireworks and a concert are scheduled to take place there July 4.

Cohen said he is optimistic Butler can become an even more prominent destination.

"I don't see this stopping, not when people see the high-end qualities we have here. We're just getting our feet wet. I can't wait to actually swim."