

***Apple Valley Batting Cage Facility
Christopher DeLong Memorial
A Gift to the Community***

Girls and boys in Apple Valley who participate in softball or baseball have truly benefited from the Christopher DeLong Memorial-Apple Valley Batting Cage Facility that was built in 1998. Youth ranging from elementary school age through high school and beyond have taken hundreds of thousands of swings each season in the cages. Prior to Christopher's death at age sixteen in June of 1997, he played baseball in the Valley Athletic Association (VAA) on in-house and traveling teams, made the high school freshman baseball team and made the varsity team as a sophomore. Christopher also became a member of the American Legion baseball team his sophomore year.

After Christopher's untimely death, a memorial dream came true in the fall of 1997. A committed group of family members, friends, neighbors, coaches, and individuals from Apple Valley High School, VAA, Apple Valley American Legion, George C. Maurer Construction and the City of Apple Valley assisted with conceptualizing, designing, building and initially funding this wonderful memorial. Not including all the labor of love donated, initial contributions to build the facility totaled over \$150,000. The purpose of the facility was to help further enhance the talent and skills for both girls and boys in softball and baseball. In May of 1998, the facility was dedicated with the help of family, friends and the Minnesota Twins. Since that time, thousands of baseball and softball players from Apple Valley step into the cages every season. The batting cages are located beyond the left field fence at Apple Valley High School's Varsity Baseball Field. One of the cornerstones of the facility was to insure that there would be no charge for its use for all kids who live in Apple Valley or participate in Apple Valley programs.

The Batting Cage Facility consists of four netted cages. Each cage is ninety feet long, anchored by a building housing seven pitching machines, an automatic ball feeder and buckets of baseball/softballs. VAA and Apple Valley High School contribute annually toward this facility. Apple Valley High School performs light

maintenance and annually removes and re-installs the nets. VAA and its softball and baseball programs contribute annually to help with the upkeep of the facility. However, the facility's annual financial requirements for maintenance and upkeep consistently exceed annual contributions. To keep the facility properly maintained, the family and friends of Christopher have always supported and solicited additional financial and other assistance from businesses, corporations, foundations and individuals.

On behalf of the Christopher DeLong Memorial and all the young children who love to play baseball and softball, we would be honored if you would consider contributing toward the annual maintenance and upkeep of this facility. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact VAA at 952-432-5618. The Valley Athletic Association manages all financial contributions toward this facility. **For a tax deductible contribution (VAA is a 501(c)(3) organization) please make checks payable to:**

**Valley Athletic Association
Attn: Apple Valley Batting Cage Facility
P.O Box 24062
Apple Valley, MN 55124-9800**

Please keep in mind that many employers will match donations made by their employees, so please check with your employer to find out if they are able to assist with a matching contribution. You should include your mailing address if you would like a receipt sent to you.

Please take time to view the photographs, construction renderings, Dedication Ceremony pamphlet and newspaper articles detailing the history of the Christopher DeLong Memorial Batting Complex Facility attached to this link.

Thank you for your interest and consideration.

applevalleybattingcagefacilityvaaF

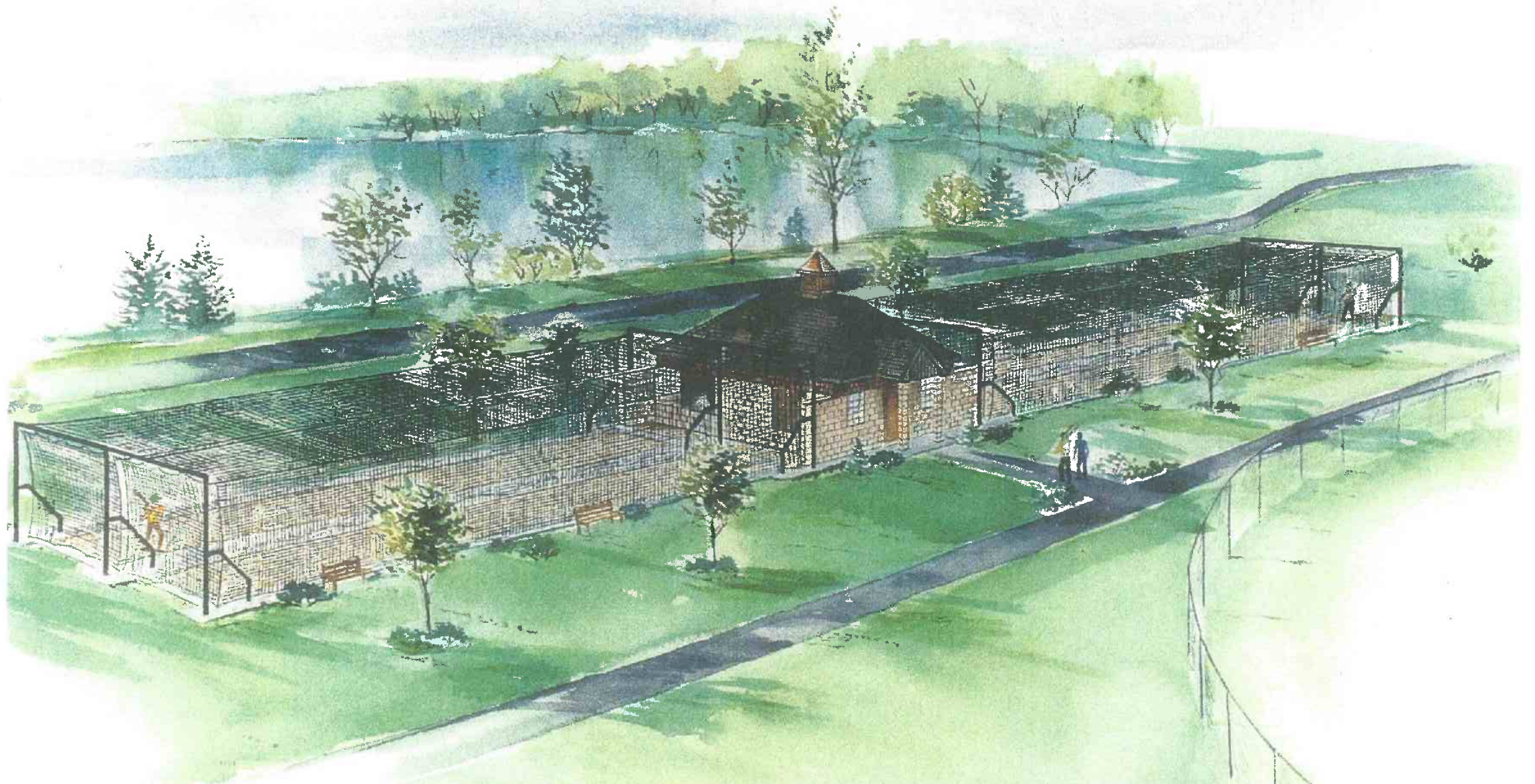
APPLE VALLEY BATTING COMPLEX

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
CHRISTOPHER JAY DELONG

FORMER VAA, AVHS AND AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL PLAYER

THIS BATTING COMPLEX IS A GIFT OF LOVE
TO OTHERS FOR ENHANCING THEIR TALENTS
AND SKILLS. CHRIS' PASSION FOR BASEBALL
WILL LIVE ON ETERNALLY AS YOUNG
PEOPLE COME HERE TO PRACTICE THE GAME
HE LOVED SO MUCH.

DEDICATED MAY, 1998



APPLE VALLEY BATTING COMPLEX

IN MEMORY OF CHRIS DELONG

W. K. Kishner

Apple Valley Batting Complex



Dedicated
Saturday, May 30, 1998

*To all our children, who contribute to who
we are while they are with us and when
they are gone.*

In Loving Memory of Christopher Jay DeLong

*Former VAA, AVHS and American
Legion Baseball Player*

*This Batting Complex is a gift of love
to others for enhancing their talents
and skills. Chris' passion for
baseball will live on eternally as
young people come here to practice
the game he loved so much.*

National Anthem AVHS Band
Flag Raising - Friends of Chris

Invocation Pastor Paul Gauche

Opening Remarks Joe Wilson

Comments Jim DeLong

Introduction of Minnesota Twins John Gordon

Recognition of Project Partners Mike Garrison

Ribbon Cutting The DeLong Family

Ceremonial - First at Bat Jim & Jay DeLong

Closing Remarks Joe Wilson

Contributions are still welcome:

*Chris DeLong Memorial
c/o Valley Athletic Association
P.O. Box 240462
Apple Valley, MN 55124*

Attention: Joe Wilson Phone: 432-9159





WALLEN ZOO CORPORATION



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LIFE BELLS

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Yellow and green notices or signs on the wall.

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PARTS
AND
LIVE WIRING









VALLEY POWER CORPORATION
www.valleypower.com

Last Year's Selling Order Summary

Item	Quantity	Price	Total
1000	100	10.00	1000.00
2000	200	20.00	4000.00
3000	300	30.00	9000.00
4000	400	40.00	16000.00
5000	500	50.00	25000.00
6000	600	60.00	36000.00
7000	700	70.00	49000.00
8000	800	80.00	64000.00
9000	900	90.00	81000.00
10000	1000	100.00	100000.00
Total	5000	500.00	250000.00

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AND HOT SURFACES





Remembering his son's love of the game

Jim Delong is seeking funds to maintain the batting cage memorial to his son

by Jeff Achen
THISWEEK NEWSPAPERS

For eight years, it has been Jim Delong's way to remember his son, Chris, and share Chris's love of baseball with other children in the community.

Now, with repairs and upkeep to make each year to the no-charge batting cages on the south campus of Apple Valley High School, Jim is seeking donations to keep the cages open for future baseball and softball players.

"It's a big part of the community, that's for sure," said Jerry Stoffel, a grounds keeper at the high school.

Jim estimates that about 3,000 area youth baseball and softball players use the facilities on an annual basis, and according to Stoffel, are those players are respectful of the facility. Even so, balls, nets, and the roll up doors eventually wear out and pitching machines require maintenance.

Each year, the Apple Valley American Legion and the Valley Athletic Association allocate funds for that purpose, but this year Jim says that despite his appreciation for what

the Legion and the VAA do, they'll need more money to keep the cages running properly.

Facility history

Jim Delong and one of Chris's coaches, Joe Wilson, had the idea to build the facility as a memorial to Chris after his death from cardiac arrhythmia on June 20, 1997. A sophomore at Apple Valley High School, Chris was only 16 years old and already an accomplished athlete in football and baseball.

"He was a good player, easy to coach, listened well," Wilson said. "I think the fact that he was a 16-year-old that made the American Legion baseball team told what his potential was."

His father said Chris was a loving son and always cherished his friends.

"He's always on our minds," Jim said. "The pain might diminish, but the sadness never goes away."

That's one reason Jim is committed to maintaining the batting cages. When he and Wilson first conceptualized the cages, they figured they'd build something to the tune of \$30,000 to \$40,000.

The American Legion do-

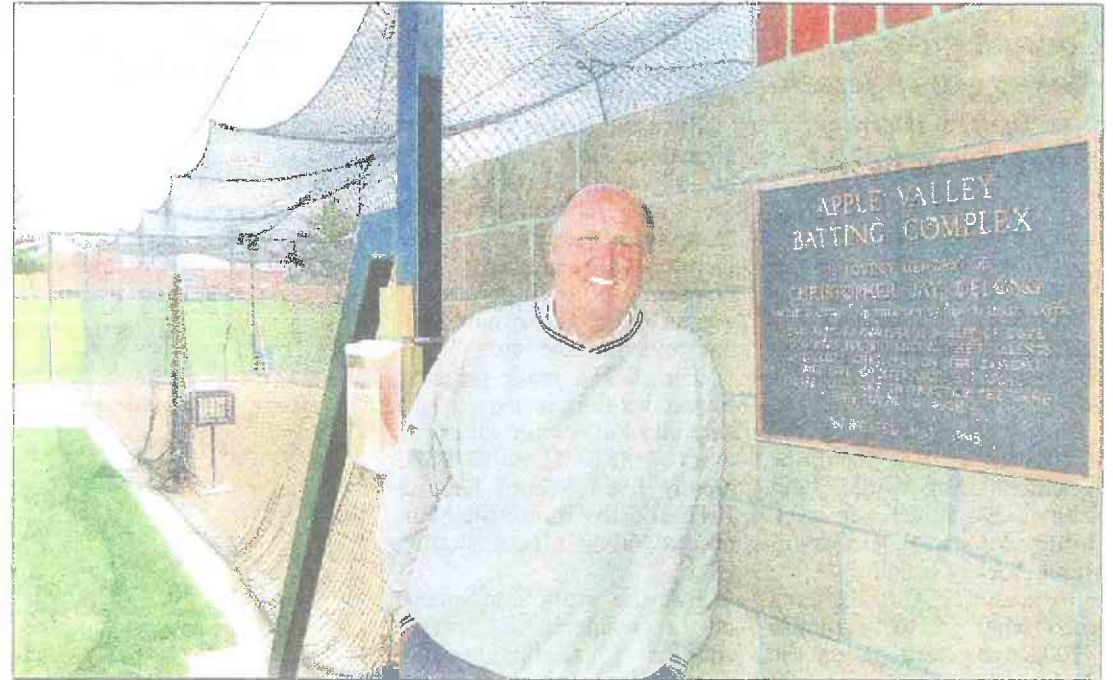


Photo by Jeff Achen

Jim Delong stands beside the batting cages he helped build in 1997 in memorial to his son, Chris. Today the batting cages are still in good shape, but Jim says the funds they've been receiving each year from the Valley Athletic Association and the American Legion are no longer enough for upkeep. So, he's asking the community to pitch in.

nated \$10,000 and community members and friends followed suit. The city of Apple Valley has also pitched in. In the end, they had raised over \$125,000, paying George C. Maurer to design and build the facility.

"We still struggle, we still struggle a lot losing a child, but we're so honored by all our friends who helped," Jim said.

Community value

Jim admits he runs into people who want to thank him for building the batting cages. Athletic Director Scott Lar-

son says the cages are popular, as well as a great teaching station for emerging ball players.

"When you talk about repetition and mechanics of swing, the machine helps in that way. They can go through a lot of reps without someone's arm getting tired," Larson said.

With a stipulation that coaches must be trained on how to use the facility, he admits, the fact that the cages are no-fee says a lot.

"You aren't going to find a building that has all these amenities, that's the unusual

part," he said.

If it sounds like exceptional sportsmanship, it only serves to honor Chris all the more appropriately.

"He was a good team player," Wilson said. "He'd do anything you asked him to do, just as long as he was out there playing. That's one of the most important things to us as high school coaches."

Jeff Achen can be reached at av.thisweek@ecm-inc.com.

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A memorial to a son, a gift to the community

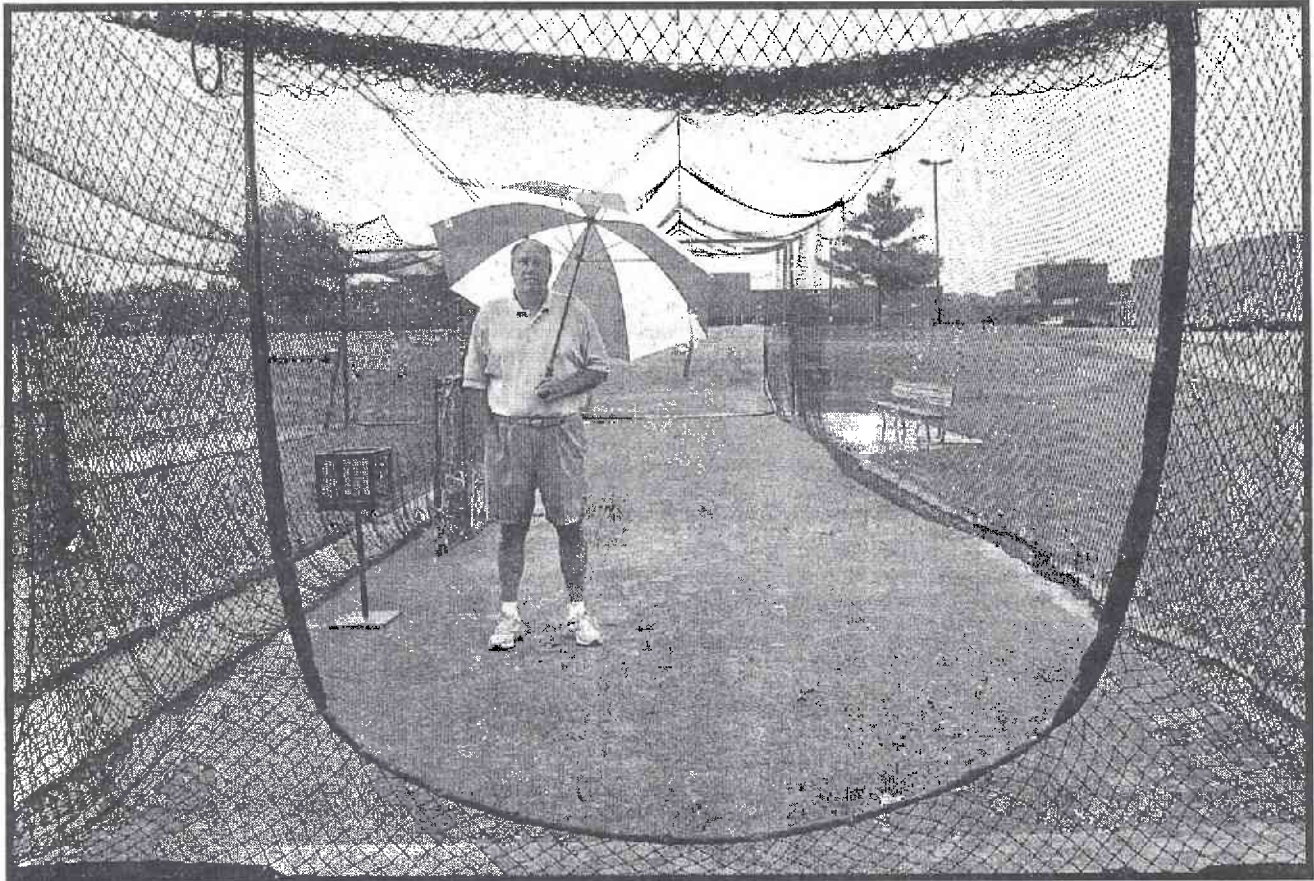
Apple Valley's Jim Delong is seeking donations to keep the high school batting cages up and running.

See Story, 20A

In Brief

If you would like to make a donation to maintain the Apple Valley batting cage facility, contact Jim and Candy Delong at (952) 435-3582.

An Apple Valley father asks his community to help save the batting cage built in the memory of his teenage son.



STORMI GREENER • sgreener@startribune.com

Nine years ago, Jim DeLong's 16-year-old son, Chris, died from a heart arrhythmia. To honor his memory, the family built a deluxe batting cage at Apple Valley High School that is free for anyone to use. But now that Jim DeLong is retired, the family is struggling to raise the funds to keep the facility open and operating.

A pitch to honor son's memory

By LORA PABST • lpabst@startribune.com

The Apple Valley varsity baseball team doesn't practice at just any field. It has a state-of-the-art batting cage where players can perfect their hitting like the pros — something that many on the team believe helped them win the Class 3A state baseball championship on Saturday.

"I can't imagine what we'd do without this because we wouldn't have anywhere to hit," said Willie Tabor, 17, a senior on the championship team.

But the future of the batting cage — built in honor of an Apple Valley baseball player who died in 1997 — is uncertain.

Jim and Candy DeLong, who dedicated the \$130,000 facility in 1998, have funded the well-used community youth sports icon with thousands of their own dollars, though other community sponsors have pitched in. Their son Chris DeLong, an Apple Valley High student, was 16 when he died of a heart arrhythmia on June 20, 1997.

But with Jim DeLong's retirement, the couple can no longer continue contributing so much toward the upkeep. Though numerous community organizations pitch in toward the \$7,500 yearly maintenance costs, the batting cage's future funding is uncertain.

"I would take out a bank loan to keep it from closing ... but yeah, we need help," said DeLong, 58, a former school principal. "We want to make sure this is always working. We're just amazed by how many kids are using this facility."

The complex, which is free and open to the public, consists of four batting cages surrounding a building that houses seven pitching machines.

Most high school teams practice on a field, with players tak-



Chris DeLong

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donations are needed to maintain the Apple Valley batting cage built in honor of Chris DeLong. Contributions can be sent to Jim and Candy DeLong, 16551 Iredale Court, Lakeville, MN 55044.

For more information, call 952-435-5582.

ing turns pitching by hand, said Apple Valley's baseball coach, Allen Iversen.

Players typically get 50 practice swings in an hour with the old-fashioned method, he said. But with the pitching machines, players get from 200 to 250 swings.

Steve McGuiggan, 17, a junior on the baseball team, said the extra practice helped the team.

"I think it would have been a lot harder to win the championship" without it, he said.

The facility is used by the Apple Valley High School softball teams, the American Legion team, and other community sports programs.

"To the baseball community, it means a lot because it provides hitting practice," DeLong said. "For the community, it means a lot because it was a memorial to our son."

On summer nights, there are typically several teams using the cages, he added. Though the public can use the batting cages, the facility's pitching machines require a training class before use.

While the Apple Valley American Legion, the Valley Athletic Association and Apple Valley High School contribute varying amounts each year to the facility, the cage has substantial up-

keep costs to replace and repair different parts every year.

Last year, updates and refurbishments cost \$12,000. The DeLongs contributed \$5,000. To keep the batting cage up and running, and to encourage future state champions, DeLong said more sponsors are needed on a long-term basis.

Chris DeLong played baseball and football at Apple Valley. He had turned 16 in February 1997 and was enjoying his driver's license.

Said Jim DeLong: "He'd probably be in here all the time, improving his skills."

Lora Pabst • 612-673-4628

A homerun for AV baseball

Donations sought for upkeep of batting cages

BY ERICA CHRISTOFFER • SUN NEWSPAPERS

From the time children start taking swings at live baseballs in elementary school, to their years of heated varsity team competition in high school, Apple Valley residents of all ages have taken their turn in the batting cages.

"It's a place where everybody can always come; everybody uses it," said Apple Valley High School senior Billy Vallesteros.

On the south side of the high school, four batting cages serve not only as a resource for young athletes, but also as a lasting tribute to a young man.

Jim DeLong built the cages as a memorial to his son, Chris, who died June 20, 1997 at the age of 16 of cardiac arrhythmia. He was mowing the lawn of a neighbor in Apple Valley, when he suddenly needed to rest under a tree. The neighbor went inside to get Chris something to drink, and by the time he returned, Chris was unconscious.

"We miss him very much," DeLong said.

He and his wife, Candy, and younger son Jay, now 23, have put their grief into bettering the community.

Chris had played in all the Valley Athletic Association's (VAA) traveling and in-house teams, made the high school freshman baseball team and

quickly advanced to the varsity team as a sophomore. He also played for the American Legion baseball team.

"His passion was in baseball," DeLong said.

With support from the Apple Valley American Legion, the city of Apple Valley, Apple Valley High School, VAA, family members, friends and coaches, \$150,000 was raised to build the batting cages with the help of George C. Maurer Construction.

"This was a God send that we chose this major project to do," DeLong said. "If it wasn't for our dearest friends, neighbors and coaches, we would have never gotten through it."

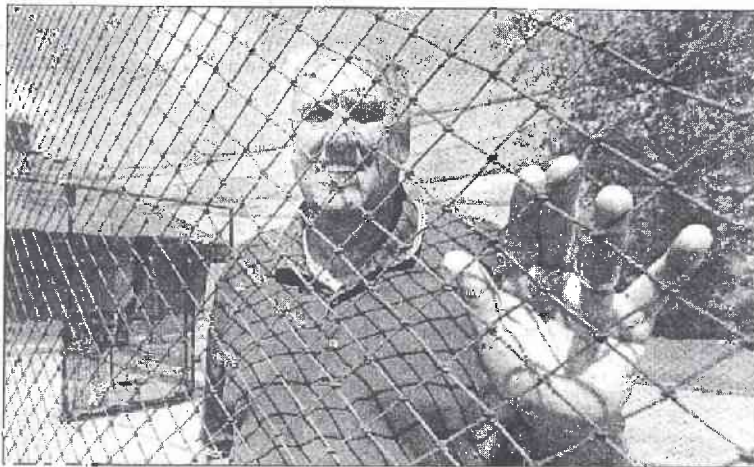
Dedicated in May 1998, DeLong said, "It was built with the intent of Apple Valley youth."

There is no charge to use the four cages. Housed in a building in the center of the structure are pitching machines for both baseball and softball. Special yellow balls are used with dimples texturing their surface to ensure proper airflow for a straight pitch.

VAA and high school coaches are trained to use the machines by Apple Valley High School Athletic Director Scott Larson.

Allen Iversen, head coach of the Apple Valley High School varsity baseball team, said the batting cages are a valuable resource for his players.

"We have stations going left and right," he said, which may have paid off in their road to the state tournament this year.



SCOTT THEISEN • SUN NEWSPAPERS

Jim DeLong built the batting cage complex at Apple Valley High School as a memorial to his son, Chris, who died in 1997. (For more photos, visit our online Photo Gallery at www.mnSun.com.)

"They are consistently used," Iversen said.

In any given season, from April to August, 3,000 youth will use the batting cages, DeLong said, often from 3:30-9 p.m. each day.

Junior Aaron Ford said from freshmen to varsity baseball players use the cages at every level.

"Ever since I could walk I started throwing with my dad," he said. He grew up with the cages and now his fifth-grade brother is taking swings in them.

With such high use, it is natural for wear and tear to develop. DeLong esti-

mated yearly maintenance at \$7,500, which comes solely through donations.

"It was built with longevity in mind - but things happen," he said.

After eight years of operation, the cages are in need of financial help for upkeep, repairs of equipment, replacement of damaged netting, worn balls, worn grass and painting.

Contribution levels include a single at \$25-\$49, double at \$50-\$149, triple at \$150-\$499, homerun at \$500-\$999, and a grand slam at \$1,000 or more; however, any donation amount will be accepted.

CAGES: TO PAGE 7A

Cages

FROM PAGE 4A

"A lot of schools have batting cages, but not of this nature," DeLong said.

"This building is very unique because it houses the pitching machines. That's what gives the kids and coaches the repetition they need for hitting and practice."

DeLong compared the cages to facilities used by college and professional players.

"It's kind of a community interest," he said.

DeLong said he enjoys seeing all the activity at the batting cages every night. He visits the facility each week, to do maintenance, clean or just watch the young players.

"It's the community's," he said. "And, it started out just a dream."

Tax-deductible contributions are now being accepted to assist in the maintenance of the Apple Valley batting cages. Checks should be made payable to: Valley Athletic Association - AV Batting Cage Facility. Send donations to Jim and Candy DeLong, 16551 Iredale Court, Lakeville, MN, 55044.