VOICES

THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

Easley welcomes back World Series

For the 11th straight year, Easley will be the center of the youth baseball world when the Big League World Series opens play later this month. This tournament has been an important asset to Easley and the Upstate and is worth celebrating every year.

This year, the World Series will be held from July 27 to Aug 3, again at the fantastic J.B. "Red" Owens Recreation Complex in Easley. The event actually kicks off a night earlier, on July 26, with a home run derby and fan fest that includes a free concert. Those activities begin at 6 p.m.

Eleven teams from around the world will play in this year's tournament. That includes six teams from the United States — including the South Carolina District 1 host team — and five international teams. Players in the Big League World Series are between 16 and 18 years old.

The Big League World Series is one of eight baseball and softball tournaments sponsored by Little League Baseball.

Some of the credit for this tournament's success and long history in the Upstate certainly belongs to organizers and sponsors. Once again this year, Baptist Easley Hospital is the tournament's presenting sponsor and headlines a long list of sponsors. And organizers and volunteers work hard year after year to ensure the tournament's success.

The J.B. "Red" Owens complex is a gem of a facility that is another key reason that the tournament returns again and again to Easley. The complex also is testament to a lesson that's been learned over and over in the Upstate: Fine facilities attract wonderful events that bolster a community's economy and stature.

Without a doubt this event bolsters both for the city of Easley. For starters, the championship game of this baseball tournament at 6 p.m. on Aug. 3 is scheduled to be broadcast on ESPN2 — as it has been in previous years. That puts Easley on television in front of baseball fans around the world. And the fact that for 11 years the Big League World Series has been held here makes it synonymous with this Little League-sponsored tournament. To be sure, Big League players around the world talk about going to Easley when they dream of playing for the championship.

The Big League World Series also brings people to the area who spend enough money to provide a midsummer boost to the city's economy. Teams, parents and others who support the tournament come to Easley, stay in Upstate hotels and eat in area restaurants.

In addition, baseball fans from around the Upstate come to watch games and wind up eating in restaurants and filling their cars with gas. In a recent year, for example, Easley-area hotels booked 750 room nights thanks to the Big League World Series.

This is an important annual contribution to Easley's economy and it's an event worth keeping in the Upstate for as many years as we can. Easley has earned being named the series' permanent host, like Little League has done with its more prominent Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pa.

Short of such an announcement, however, all of the Upstate looks forward to seeing this fantastic event return to the region every year for the foreseeable future. Little League has a history of keeping its tournaments in the same cities for extended periods.

Just as important, given the hard work that Easley puts in year after year to host this tournament, it's difficult to imagine any location being a more perfect host for such an event.