

Marc Anthony, Javier Báez, and Henry Cárdenas join kids in Puerto Rico to celebrate restored community baseball fields through LISC's *Play Ball Again* initiative

Maestro Cares Foundation, Good Bunny Foundation, Cubs Charities and UNICEF USA help cut the ribbon on the first of 25 fields being restored after devastation of Hurricanes Maria, Irma

Program creates space for programming for more than 17,500 youth

LOIZA, Puerto Rico (Dec. 14, 2019)— Little League baseball is coming home to hurricane-weary communities in Puerto Rico.

Today, music icon Marc Anthony and Chicago Cubs All-Star infielder Javier Báez, joined local officials and families to celebrate restored ball fields at Parque de la Comunidad La Ceiba in Loíza, which were demolished by hurricanes that devastated much of the island in 2017. This is the first project completed under a new initiative called [Play Ball Again](#), which aims to restore up to 25 athletic fields and related facilities that will serve 17,500 youth across the island.

“This is a celebration of resilience, just as much as it is of baseball,” said Marc Anthony, as he met community members and cheered the first pitch. “In rebuilding these fields, we can help families take another step beyond the trauma of the last two years toward a stronger, healthier future for our children and their families.”

The \$1.6 million *Play Ball Again* initiative was launched by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) earlier this year as part of a broad effort to spur economic recovery across the island. [Maestro Cares Foundation](#), which Anthony helped form in 2012, teamed up with Good Bunny Foundation and [UNICEF USA](#) to fund the first \$300,000 in field renovations. [Cubs Charities](#) joined the effort with another \$100,000, and Kohler Company added its support with donated bathroom fixtures for onsite facilities.

“Two years after these devastating storms, the need to rebuild the island remains strong,” said Báez, whose family is from the Bayamón area. “Cubs Charities understood the need and has stepped up to the plate to help restore baseball fields and give kids throughout Puerto Rico the opportunity to play the game. This rebuild will make a big difference for the community, and I am proud to continue my efforts to restore the island.”

“Since its inception, Maestro Cares has incorporated baseball fields in its work building orphanages throughout Latin America,” added Henry Cárdenas, co-founder of the foundation. “This project allows us to contribute to the restoration of more athletic fields in Puerto Rico and serve children around the Island.”

All told, LISC anticipates that *Play Ball Again* will restore another two dozen fields over the next year, including sites in Vega Baja, Carolina, Yabucoa, Yauco, Utuado, Caguas, and Casteñer, in

addition to Loíza. These communities represent a diverse geographic slice of Puerto Rico, encompassing some of the most concentrated numbers of youth players in rural areas and those hardest hit by the hurricanes.

“Local fields, teams, and programs are at the heart of Puerto Rico’s tradition of baseball excellence,” noted Carlos Pagan, regional director for Little League Latin America, who was in Loíza to celebrate the new fields. “They not only help build great players; even more importantly, they help build great people.”

Through *Play Ball Again*, LISC has been working with a range of organizations and community leaders to outline redevelopment plans for fields, including [Little League Puerto Rico](#), [PathStone Enterprise Center](#), and [All Hands and Hearts](#).

“These collaborations are part of our long-term commitment to Puerto Rico, one focused on building a broadly shared prosperity and a good quality of life in both urban and rural areas,” said Maurice A. Jones, LISC president and CEO. “I can’t imagine a better illustration of those goals than youth playing on a ballfield, with coaches teaching and leading, parents cheering, and a community coming together to support each other.”

“After so many difficult moments, these spaces will bring hope and union to the youth, so that they continue dreaming, growing and making a better future,” said Noah Assad, co-founder of the Good Bunny Foundation. “The goal of all this is to restore happiness to the Puerto Rican people and support them to grow as a society.”

“UNICEF USA is incredibly grateful for the support of partners like LISC, Maestro Cares and Good Bunny Foundation, who share our belief that play is the right of every child,” said Anucha Browne, chief engagement, advocacy and global programs officer at UNICEF USA. “In rebuilding these fields, they are not only helping a community that has endured so much over the past two years, but also giving kids the chance to play and just be kids.”

About LISC

With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America – great places to live, work, visit, do business, and raise families. Since 1979, LISC has invested \$20 billion to build or rehab 400,500 affordable homes and apartments and develop 66.8 million square feet of retail, community, and educational space. *Play Ball Again* builds on LISC’s significant expertise in financing recreational facilities and athletic fields in underserved communities, as well as providing technical assistance to advance youth sports, including a 20-year partnership with the NFL to create 350 fields serving 600,000 youth, as well as work with ESPN to reclaim vacant lots for basketball courts in 14 cities. To learn more, visit www.lisc.org.

About Maestro Cares Foundation

Maestro Cares Foundation is a nonprofit Foundation headquartered in Chicago and founded in 2012. The foundation aims to improve the quality of life of orphaned and disadvantaged

children in Latin America and the United States. Maestro Cares Foundation works to achieve its mission by creating safe and healthy environments for children to live, learn and play while supporting their development and academic needs. The Foundation helps to raise the necessary funding to continue to grow their mission by collaborating with corporate and nonprofit partners. Since the launch of its first home for orphaned boys in the Dominican Republic in 2014, the foundation has opened youth homes, community centers, school, foster homes, and launched an educational program in Lima and Cusco, Peru. Altogether, the foundation has committed to 18 projects providing safe and loving spaces for thousands of orphaned and disadvantaged children in Dominican Republic, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Chile, Puerto Rico, and Chicago, IL. To learn more visit: www.maestrocares.org.

About Cubs Charities

Cubs Charities harnesses the passion of Cubs fans to improve the lives of children and families across Chicago and beyond. Cubs Charities' goal is to provide increased access to sports opportunities and targets improvements in health, fitness and education for those at risk. Through grants to quality nonprofit programs, development of parks and baseball fields, and other community initiatives, the Cubs and Cubs Charities help fulfill a commitment to be the best in the game, on and off the field. For more information, visit <https://www.mlb.com/cubs/community/cubs-charities>.

About the Good Bunny Foundation

The Good Bunny Foundation works to improve the quality of life of Puerto Rican youth through the support of youth arts and sports initiatives, in collaboration with other non-profit organizations. The Foundation led two relief initiatives providing aid after Hurricane María, which included the handing out of meals and the complete reconstruction of 10 homes. In 2018, the Foundation organized the first annual "La Nueva Tradición" event, in which 30,000 Puerto Rican children received gifts of toys and musical instruments. Currently, the Foundation's efforts are focused on the Play Ball Again initiative to restore Little League baseball fields in different municipalities of Puerto Rico.

About UNICEF USA

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in more than 190 countries and territories to put children first. UNICEF USA supports UNICEF's work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States, working toward the day when no children die from preventable causes and when every child has a safe and healthy childhood. For more information, visit www.unicefusa.org.

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