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Sunday, July 17, 2005 - 12:00 AM

## Indoor sports center to open second complex in Provo

Grace Leong DAILY HERALD

If you want to get your batting average up, you'd better get your grade point average up first, or you won't be able to get into The HitZone.

That's a membership requirement stipulated by Joe Lengal, owner of The HitZone, a 16,000-square-foot indoor sports complex in Payson.

He says he checks the progress reports of his customers, mostly children and teenagers, because he doesn't want them to neglect their studies to play sports. In fact, Lengal plans to add a tutorial studies room at the sports complex in August and hire two school teachers to help his student customers.

Opened just last month, The HitZone features a 3-D archery range, two virtual golf simulators, and a softball and baseball batting cage for training youth and professional sports teams. The complex, located on the site of a former True Value Hardware store in Payson, is run by 10 workers including six instructors from Payson and Spanish Fork high schools and local college softball players.

Lengal, who was involved in auto sales management and financing with Barber Brothers Motor in Spanish Fork for eight years, started The HitZone as a venue for baseball players to work out during the cold winter months when baseball fields become inaccessible.

"There's no place, or very few places, in south Utah County for baseball players to work out during the two to three months of winter here," said Lengal, who was inspired to start the business because of his son, James Lengal, a baseball player with the Salem Avalanche and the Salt Lake Stingers.

"I was watching my son play at a winter baseball tournament in Phoenix. At that time, the temperatures there were about 75 degrees, which is great weather for outdoor sports. But I was puzzled because the indoor sports complexes there were jam packed," Lengal said.

That's because the players can get their training done quickly with state-of-the-art equipment and in half the time, he said. "A baseball park only has dirt and fences, and you need someone

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to pitch to you and gather up the baseballs. But in an indoor facility, you can do all the pitching, batting and fielding by yourself with the equipment."

The growing number of baseball teams and players in Utah County has also led to greater demand for indoor sports complexes, he said. "The headcounts of teams and players has grown in Utah county. The number of accelerated youth baseball leagues in cities from Provo to Santaquin has grown from 40 to more than 400 in the last four years."

He also plans to open a second indoor sports complex in Provo in late December. "We're in the process of site selection in Provo, and we're hoping to get \$60,000 in venture financing for construction," he said. The proposed complex, to range between 16,000 square feet and 22,000 square feet in size, will include 9,000 square feet for baseball and softball, and another 7,000 square feet to 8,000 square feet for an indoor youth soccer area.

The HitZone also provides freeze-frame, slow-playing video cameras in its training areas to help pitchers and batters sharpen their skills. "I got the idea when I was touring Arizona State University and saw how they were training their college baseball teams with video cameras. They would stop every 20 pitches and watch the video to see what they were doing right or wrong," Lengal said.

The HitZone's indoor archery area consists of 20 20-yard and 30-yard ranges featuring more than 20 stuffed elk, deer, wild turkey and mountain lion targets for hunters. The virtual golf simulators, each 15 feet high and 20 feet wide, allow people to play 18 holes of golf in such famous golf courses as Pebble Beach, Spyglass and St. Andrews, England.

"We also have a 55-foot batting tunnel screen and batting cage for unlimited pitching, batting or fielding practice. You won't get sun burned or exhausted from heat," Lengal said.

Since the opening of the complex last month, The HitZone has already exceeded its projected customer traffic.

"We average about six teams per day, or 72 people, and we also have 35 individual walk-up customers daily. The turnout with the ladies softball teams has been exceptionally good because of ongoing state tournaments and the hot weather has also brought a lot of business in. We've been turning away two teams, or 24 people a day," Lengal said. Customer traffic will likely peak from November through February because of winter conditions and a limited number of playing fields in Payson and the neighboring cities of Santaquin, Spanish Fork and Springville, he said.

Lengal said he received \$30,000 in venture capital for The HitZone with the help of M.J.M. Capital Inc. of Provo, which helped arrange start-up financing for its five pitching machines, a television system with five cameras, baseball and softball equipment, a 62-inch big-screen television, office equipment and other improvements.

"All I had to do was provide a three-year business plan and some personal financial statements, and within a week, my phone was ringing off the hook," he said. "We received the financing we needed because of our revenue growth potential, about \$225,000 in annual net sales projected, low overhead costs and equipment costs.

Part of Lengal's marketing strategy includes linking his Web site www.thehitzoneutah.com, which is scheduled to be launched Aug. 1, to such high-traffic Web sites as Rocky Mountain School of Baseball and the Super Series of America Baseball.

**The HitZone**

Owners: Joe and Jenny Lengal

Founded in April 2004

Industry: Indoor baseball, softball, archery and golf sports complex

Location: 61S. 100 West in Payson



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Work Force: 10 employees

Startup costs: \$45,000

Membership costs: \$7 for single visits, \$35 for monthly membership, \$75 for seasonal pass, \$50 per hour for team rentals.

Contact: 400-6343

Website: [www.thehitzzoneutah.com](http://www.thehitzzoneutah.com) to be launched Aug. 1

*This story appeared in The Daily Herald on page C10.*

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