

Ater: Alton perfect fit for upcoming American Legion Great Lakes Regional Tourney

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
April 6 2015 2:20 PM



Derrick Ater paid a visit to Alton this past Friday on behalf of the American Legion Great Lakes Regional Tournament set for August.

Ater will be the tourney director for the American Legion Great Lakes Regional. Riverbender.com had an interview Friday morning with Ater and Dennis Sharp, general manager of the Senior Legion and Junior Legion teams in Alton at Lloyd Hopkins Field.

Alton hosted the American Legion World Series in 2000 under the direction of Dave and Jess Hopkins, so the tradition with the Legion Baseball is well established.

“This is my 11th national tournament and ninth as tournament director,” Ater said. “The setting here in Alton is absolutely perfect for this type of regional tournament. With Alton having as good a team as it has, if Alton stays in the help, it will help participation.”

Alton Mayor Brant Walker has said the American Legion Great Lakes Regional Tournament will mean \$750,000-plus to the Alton area for hotel accommodations, restaurant visits and trips to convenience stores, grocery stores, etc., in August.

Ater expects winners from Michigan and Indiana to bring a strong contingency of fans to Alton.

Lloyd Hopkins Field is perfect for this type of tournament, said Ater.

“It is a community-based park with ample seating for what we might expect,” he said. “The infield is great and seamless. The park has good lines with 325 feet on each line, 360 in the gap and 385 the other way. It is a good, competitive ballpark.”

The winner of the regional in Alton will play in the American Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C.

Ater said he was impressed by the players on both Alton and Edwardsville High School's teams last Thursday night in a game he watched. Several of the players are on the summer Senior Legion team based in Alton.

While here, Ater visited the park, the Holiday Inn Atrium Hotel and made sure transportation needs will be met.

“I come to town and try to get a sense of what the committee needs,” he said.

Dennis Sharp has become literally a legend in Legion baseball in Alton with nearly 20 years directing the team.

“It is a big tournament and just because you bid, doesn’t necessarily mean you will get it,” he said of hosting the regional. “Hosting the Legion World Series in 2000 has allowed us to host more big tournaments like that. I use the park for our big Fourth of July Tournament every summer.”

While in Alton, Ater normally visits with the Alton Fire Department and Alton Police Department and makes sure they are okay with accommodations. He said in each community the police and fire departments provide such a strong sense of help.

“We are only five minutes away from the hospital, so they will make sure we have some type of emergency coverage here,” he said. “We are discussing whether to have a trainer on site.”

Ater hails from Lewiston, Idaho, what he describes as a “baseball community.” He said his two children played Legion ball when they were young and he coached some of their teams in the beginning.

Ater is a Vietnam veteran and also has a law practice in Lewiston. He said he loves the time he spends with American Legion baseball.

The American Legion Tourney director said he sees Alton as a wonderful community and that Sharp runs a top-notch program.

“The program is obviously well organized and most of the issues we have run into so far are small and they have covered them entirely,” Ater said.

Local transportation isn’t the easiest, Sharp said, but the Grandpa Gang has stepped forward and will be doing the bulk of the driving during the Legion tourney.

“We are really thrilled the Grandpa Gang is going to help us out,” Sharp said.

