



\$500 donation helps put girls back on field

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Manchester – The season outlook improved for the Manchester Junior Debs Softball League yesterday, when a business donated \$500 to replace thousands of dollars worth of equipment stolen during the off season.

About a dozen preteen Junior Debs spent an hour last night gripping bats, strapping on catcher pads and squeezing into helmets at Indian Head Athletics in downtown Manchester.

It was what most girls dream of — a shopping spree with someone else’s money.

The donation came from MVP Health Care, a Schenectady, N.Y., based insurance company with New Hampshire offices in Bedford. The company made the donation after officials read about the league’s plight in yesterday’s New Hampshire Union Leader, said regional administrator Chris Henderson.

“It hits home, and it truly is unfortunate for anyone to steal from young girls,” Henderson said yesterday. “All they want to do is play softball.”

The mood was light in the store last night, although it was obvious that \$500 doesn’t go far when it comes to new sporting equipment.

Coaches made mental calculations and had a volunteer strap on various sizes of catcher’s equipment. Meanwhile, girls sized up aluminum bats at the rear of the store, removing and returning them to racks as if they were spring dresses at Fashion Bug.

Jennifer St. Pierre, 11, said her favorite bat is gone. A blue aluminum slugger that yielded a triple last season.

“If I get any new bats, I don’t think it’s going to be the same,” said St. Pierre, a member of the team sponsored by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2320. Yet, she was grateful for MVP Health Care’s donation.

“I’m glad they were there because we would be playing with sticks, seriously,” St. Pierre said.

“Or have to buy bats with our own money,” chimed in teammate Jennifer Warren, who is 10.

More could be on the way. Members of the IBEW have kicked in \$300, and League officials yesterday had yet to check e-mails and telephone calls, which may include more donations.

And the New Hampshire Fisher Cats baseball team is offering to collect donated sporting equipment for the League.

The burglary of the Junior Deb canteen was discovered in late March. The culprits made off with four sets of catcher’s equipment, 15 batting helmets with face guards and 12 bats.

Officials said the alarm system wasn’t working because they couldn’t afford the monthly bill.

At the cash register, \$500 covered only two sets of catcher’s equipment and a few bats. But with a donation from Indian Head, the League left the store with three catcher outfits, five bats and some batting helmets.

“It’ll really help us out, get us going,” said coach Al Paquet.