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RBI forges major partnership with KPMG

Big Four accounting firm inks long-term deal to aid program

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

One of the nation's Big Four accounting firms has teamed up with Major League Baseball to give the RBI program a big assist.

KPMG LLP has signed a long-term deal with MLB Properties and will invest \$1 million a year and the resources of its 20,000 U.S. employees into making the Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) program even bigger and better than what it has become in the past 16 years.

The plan is to have those employees volunteer their time to coach, teach and fundraise, taking RBI to a new level in cities throughout the U.S. And with KPMG's international reach (the firm has 113,000 employees worldwide, including its U.S. contingent) the hope is to continue to grow the sport on a grass-roots international basis as well.

"We'd like to see a massive influx of kids in this program with a goal to develop on the baseball fields and in the classrooms as professionals," Tim Flynn, KPMG's chairman and chief executive, said in a telephone interview from New York on Thursday. "We're very excited about the opportunity. This is a chance for us to have our people give back to the communities and help revitalize the inner cities."

The RBI program was founded in Los Angeles in 1989, and has been under the MLB umbrella since 1991. It has long been a main prong of MLB's multi-faceted approach to reinvigorate baseball interest in African-American kids from underprivileged neighborhoods. As such, MLB has invested \$20 million in the program in the past 16 years.

MLB has also put \$10 million into its first Youth Baseball Academy in Compton, Calif., just 15 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. That facility has been open for 16 months and has catered to more than 2,000 kids from the surrounding area, who have not only excelled in baseball on the field, but have taken pre-college courses and learned about other disciplines in the business of the sport.

Likewise, the RBI program, through the auspices of the Boys & Girls Club of America, has given more than 100,000 kids an opportunity to play baseball and softball.

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According to statistics provided by MLB, the 30 Major League clubs have picked in excess of 150 RBI participants in the First-Year Player Draft, including 17 this year.

RBI alums currently playing in the big leagues, include Carl Crawford of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, Coco Crisp of the Boston Red Sox, Jimmy Rollins of the Philadelphia Phillies and Dontrelle Willis of the Florida Marlins.

"RBI is a tremendously important program for us in the inner cities, building a branch with the kids and their families," said John Brody, MLB's senior vice president of corporate sales and marketing, when also reached by telephone in New York. "What KPMG is doing from a financial standpoint with its \$1 million donation each year is tremendous, but the most important thing for us is to help build the RBI program from an infrastructure standpoint in more cities, for more kids. That's where the 20,000 employees comes in, helping out in the community with life skills."

During the first year of its relationship with MLB, KPMG is expected to lend its organizational and managerial skills to develop the RBI program.

For the long term, KPMG plans to expand the firm's volunteer efforts to all cities where there are KPMG offices. This season, those efforts will focus on six cities -- Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Washington D.C.

KMPG has already been involved with the RBI program in New York's famous Harlem neighborhood, located in Manhattan north of Central Park, and that factor was one of the decisive reasons that the firm expanded its commitment to the program.

"Almost everybody at some time in their lives has been involved with baseball and can identify with the game," Flynn said. "What we believe is that the power of this program is very unique. The baseball diamond can be carried into the classroom and the classroom back out to the baseball diamond."

***Barry M. Bloom** is a national reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.*