

Cooperative Ventures Help Meet the Recreational Needs of Special Populations

Alachua County, through the Parks Division of the Public Works Department, has entered into a number of public-private cooperative ventures to provide recreational opportunities to the citizens of Alachua County. As part of the cooperative agreements the private sector contractors are to reach-out to special populations in the county to assist them in accessing the recreational opportunities they provide. Two good examples of this effort are found at Jonesville Park.

The Gainesville Soccer Alliance (GSA) (<http://www.gainesvillesoccer.org/index.htm>) constructed and manages the six soccer fields at Jonesville Park. To develop the soccer complex, GSA provided over \$550,000 and the County provided over \$600,000 that included the cost of the soccer field concession-restroom building. As managers of the soccer facility GSA provides programs and scheduling services while the County provides field and building maintenance. As part of their management agreement, GSA provides soccer practices, games, tournaments, and scholarships for children of low income families.



GSA also provides the TOPSoccer program at Jonesville Park. TOPSoccer is a program for kids of all disabilities ranging from wheelchairs to mild autism from age 3 years and up. The program has been provided for the past three years and currently has 50-60 participants and 150 volunteers. In 2008 GSA received one of fourteen TopSoccer grants from the US Youth Soccer Association and Adidas. TOPSoccer is a community-based training and team placement program for young athletes with disabilities organized by youth

soccer association volunteers. The program is designed to bring the opportunity of learning and playing soccer to any child who has a mental or physical disability (<http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/programs/TOPSoccer.asp>). The program has been very successful and greatly appreciated by the participants and their families. Photos and additional information about GSA's TOPSoccer program may be viewed at <http://gainesvillesocceralliance.gainesvillevoice.com/default.asp?item=2232345>.



The second example is the cooperative agreement with Jonesville Tennis LLC (<http://www.jonesvilletennis.com/>). Jonesville Tennis helped fund the development of 14 clay tennis courts and a pro-shop at Jonesville Park and now manages the tennis complex for the County. Jonesville Tennis provided over \$950,000 and the County provided over \$1,100,000 for the construction of the tennis complex. Jonesville Tennis is responsible for all aspects of the tennis complex operation and maintenance. In its effort to promote tennis for all individuals, Jonesville Tennis hosts charity events, provides donations to programs facilitated through the

Gainesville Area Community Tennis Association (<http://www.gainesvilletennis.com/>), hosts free court space to the Junior Team Tennis program, provides the Quickstart program for children, and a free Playday program. These programs provide numerous opportunities for individuals of all abilities and income to access and enjoy the sport of tennis. Additionally, through a combination of scholarships and bartering for maintenance assistance, Jonesville Tennis provides an opportunity for children of low income families to be members of the United States Tennis Association and to participate in the Jonesville Tennis programs.



Consideration is being given to developing a program similar to the MaliVai Washington Kids Foundation (<http://www.malwashington.com>). This program promotes academic achievement and positive life skills to underserved youth through the game of tennis. Additional plans are being made for a disabled youth tennis program.

Current efforts by the Parks Division to continue meeting the recreational needs of the County's special populations includes a public-private cooperative agreement with another local soccer club. The soccer club is looking to provide both soccer and basketball programs at the soon to be completed Cynthia Moore Chestnut Park and Clark Butler Nature Preserve located at 2315 S.E. 35th Street.