

Youth sports groups
score big

Orlando

JUNE 2016

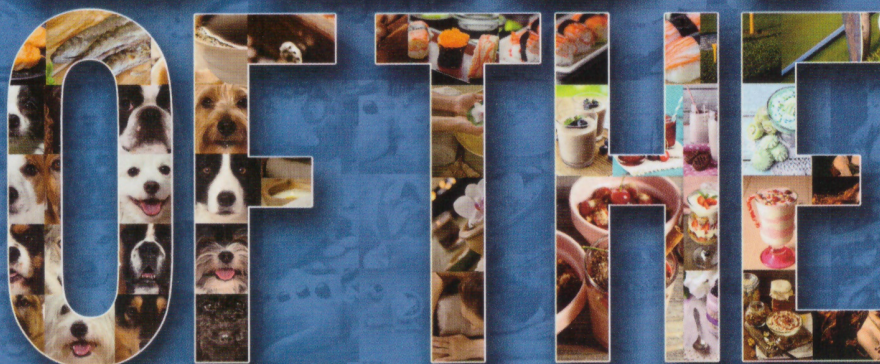
FAMILY

92
winners
that really
take the
cake!



Seafood
Jewelry
Massage
Yoga
Ice Cream
Flower Shop
Art Supplies
Brewery
Gyro
Facial
Golf
Chocolate
Brisket
Doggie Daycare
Bagels
Menswear
Wings
and

*Much
more!*



PRSRD STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 956
HARRISBURG, PA

Play Ball!

Five local nonprofits help kids from all backgrounds achieve dreams on and off the field.

By Lisa Beach

When it's time to get their game on, most kids in Greater Orlando can choose from a smorgasbord of youth sports programs that literally cover all the bases. But when those children come from a disadvantaged background or have developmental challenges to overcome, finding the right team can be difficult.

That's why a number of local nonprofits, including one specifically geared toward kids with special needs, put the focus on fun and fitness by providing opportunities to learn a new sport, participate on a team, build skills, make friends and get healthy, no matter who the children are or where they come from. The following programs, which offer scholarships for those in financial need, are standouts in that regard, making Orlando a better place to live one game at a time.

All Stars ABC

Do your kids have hoop dreams? Then check out All Stars ABC, an official affiliate organization of the Jr. NBA and partner with the Orlando Magic. Targeting boys and girls of all ages, All Stars incorporates character-building and educational experiences into its leagues, camps and programs (primarily basketball, but multiple sports for younger kids). Leagues cost \$60; one-hour skill-building camps cost \$10 with discounts for multiple sessions. Programs take place at various community churches and schools. Committed to academic excellence, All Stars requires participants to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA. If kids fall short, they can receive tutoring through All Stars.

"It's not so much what we do with the sports, but what we do with the schools and the mentoring," says JaJa Richards, M.Ed., president of All Stars and a former pro basketball player. "Our main focus is the importance of education, so we promote a triple threat: to be a good person, student and player. We want kids to focus on the first two, so we help them become good people and productive citizens. We believe firmly that academics must take precedence over athletics."

Central Florida Dreamplex

For children with special needs, the 5,000-square-foot Central Florida Dreamplex features adaptive sports, recreation activities and group fitness classes for the whole family, regardless of their abilities.

With a tagline of "ordinary sports for



The First Tee

extraordinary people," Dreamplex offers programs and group classes including taekwondo, cheerleading, gymnastics, traditional and wheelchair basketball, goalball (for those with vision impairments), traditional and wheelchair soccer, and quad rugby. Visitors can choose from various day

pass and membership options.

"We're excited to provide recreation and physical fitness for people with disabilities," says Cameron Gomes, general manager of Dreamplex. "It's a one-stop place for families, because family members can get in a workout while another family member receives therapy or participates in a group class."

On the horizon? A 10-acre athletic-training complex that would cater to a wide range of people with disabilities, both physical and developmental.

"We do a lot of fundraising, and we're partnering with different groups to bring that about," says Gomes. "Our goal is to be in the first phase of our new facility by 2020."

Central Florida YMCA

With 27 family centers throughout six counties, the Central Florida YMCA is one of the area's biggest youth-sports program providers, serving 25,000-30,000 kids each year. Its year-round programs, geared for ages 3-17, include core sports such as soccer, T-ball, flag football, basketball and cheerleading. Some locations also offer martial arts, speed lacrosse, tennis, volleyball and swimming. Most programs run in eight-week sessions (\$90 for members, \$175 for nonmembers).

"The best thing I like to hear is that sports are not just about winning and losing, but about getting healthy," says Jason Hernandez, senior youth development director at the Dr. Phillips location. "We recently had a fourth grader who never played basketball before. He got onto a beginner team, which ended up losing all season except for one game. Afterwards, his mom told me she was so excited that her son had lost 10 pounds during the season and gained confidence."

"Playing basketball wasn't about the win-loss record, it was about losing weight and gaining confidence. This puts it into perspective about why we truly do sports at the YMCA."

The First Tee of Central Florida

Using the game of golf as a backdrop, The First Tee of Central Florida provides educational programs that build character, instill positive values and pro-



Good Time Sports

more healthy choices. Targeting kids ages 7-18, the nonprofit partners with more than half a dozen Orlando-area golf clubs to help implement the program on their greens, reaching an average of 225 kids a week.

At the heart of its signature "Golf and Life Skills Experience" program are core values and healthy habits. This nine-week program costs \$50 at most locations (plus an annual \$25 fee) and includes a weekly 90-minute session, loaner clubs and program materials.

"We think of ourselves as a youth-development program, not a golf program, because kids are learning interpersonal skills, self-management skills and goal-setting, all seamlessly integrated into our curriculum," says Executive Director Thomas J. Lawrence. "One of our board members compares it to hiding the medicine in the bologna. We use golf as a tool to help kids reach their wildest dreams on and off the golf course."

Good Time Sports

Just a few decades ago, kids organized their own daily pickup games in their neighborhoods. Today, they spend most of their time playing video games or on social media. Adrian Ravelo, a father of three, wants to change that by re-creating in Central Florida the fun activities he played growing up. Ravelo made good on his promise by organizing neighborhood games and funding it out of his own pocket. He officially made it a nonprofit in 2013, calling it Good Time Sports, an all-volunteer organization he runs with his wife Tanya.

Monthly game days take place at Lawton Chiles Middle School in Oviedo. Donations are accepted (but not required) to help defray event costs, including gym rental fees, liability insurance and participant prizes.

Each game day plays out differently, but past events have included kickball, soccer, whiffle ball, Big Wheel racing, basketball, dodgeball, volleyball and Ultimate Frisbee. All ages can join in the fun, including parents. After warming up, everyone breaks off into groups based on age and skill level and then rotates through different game stations.

"Our goals are to raise money to hold weekly games, open a self-sustained facility, and increase the number of volunteers," explains Ravelo. "This will help us achieve our mission to provide local kids and their families with a positive support system through sports and social events."

Lisa Beach is a freelance writer, humor blogger, mother of two teenagers, and recovering homeschool mom who lived to write about it. More of her writing can be found at LisaBeachWrites.com and Tweenior-Moments.com.

GARAGE SMART



Coating starting at
\$999*
based on 400 sq.ft.

Tough Floors... Easy Prices!



Tuxedo



Boulder



Saddle Tan



Fawn Beige



Terazzo



Grey



Tan

ArmorSeal® Floors 4x Stronger than epoxy



Start small...



or **GO BIG!**

FLOOR COATINGS • GARAGE CABINETS • OVERHEAD RACKS • WALL SYSTEMS



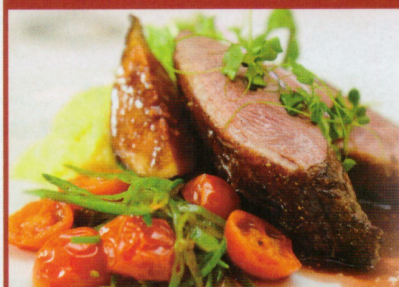
Outfitting Garages Since 2004

CALL 407-447-8890

for a FREE In-Home Consultation

Visit us at garagedesignworks.com

LOOKING FOR A GREAT LOCAL RESTAURANT TO TRY OUT?



Check our new monthly dining review.

Every month in

Orlando
FAMILY

For More Information (407) 648-7002 • OrlandoFamilyMagazine.com