

A Dream of Fields - Ocracoke's First Baseball Team!

In the 1989 Oscar nominated movie, *Field of Dreams*, an Iowa farmer hears a voice while walking in his cornfield. The voice tells him, "If you build it, they will come." In response to the voice, the farmer builds a baseball diamond and the movie unfolds.

It seems that some Ocracoke residents and parents may have heard the same voice. Baseball is described as America's game and now the young people of Ocracoke can share in the experience. Through the efforts of this group of volunteers, Ocracoke has its first ever little league baseball team!

They built it and the players turned out.

Last summer, the Youth Center under the leadership of Karen Lovejoy started a baseball program just for fun to teach some basic skills. This spring Karen met with the coaches from last year to see if there was interest in participating in the Hatteras Island little league. She then made the contact with the Hatteras league and they said "yes".

This initial effort has yielded a local team of 15 boys aged 10 -12 who are now part of the Cal Ripkin Division of Hatteras Island Babe Ruth Little League baseball, the first ever for Ocracoke Island. Photos were taken of the first pitch and sent to Major League Baseball as a piece of recorded history of the sport. Next year the group hopes to have T-Ball for the younger children, as well as a team of 7-9 year olds.

The Ocracoke Civic and Business Association is the sponsor for the Ocracoke's baseball team, "The Raptors" and through their sponsorship cost have supplied the equipment and the uniforms.

Vince O'Neal, manager of the team spoke of this being a dream of his for a long time. Son Carson is an avid baseball fan and could only play if his family took him to Hatteras during the busy summer months when their restaurant was in full swing. Baseball and softball used to be a big interest on the Outer Banks, Ocracoke school even had its own softball team. Hatteras had its own big league player, Dick Burrus. At one time there was a playing field where the Day Care Center is located and before that the playing field was located where the big parking lot with boat ramp now sits. But over time, land for sports became scarce as development increased. Keith McDermott generously offered his front lawn for the team practices this spring. All the parents involved are excited and passionate about the importance of this for the kids and community.

Baseball is one of the most loved of American sports. Unlike basketball where only 5 kids are on a team, baseball offers a playing field of 9 spots and it's played outdoors. Vince reports that the team has had 5 games with Hatteras and had tied 2, lost 2 and won 1. All the boys are rotated on the team, experiencing different positions and opportunities for skill building. It is clear to the entire coach group that this baseball league is not about winning although that is certainly celebrated, it is about giving kids a chance to work as a team, learn about themselves, learn self discipline and patience and about how to accept the ups and downs of winning and losing graciously.

Right now finding a field is a high priority. Vince is hoping they can find a permanent multipurpose playing field on land donated or offered at a price that can be purchased with the help of fund drives. They envision a private Parks and Recreation style athletic program that is not dependant on funds from the County or State. The team is still considered a program under the Ocracoke Youth Center so all donations are tax deductible. Coaching is provided by Bill Cole, Brian Samick, Adam Carter and John Kattenburg.



Left to right back row: Coach Brian Samick, Dylan Sutton, Carson O'Neal, Robbie Sampson, Spencer Gaskins, William Caswell, Adam Sitterson, Eldon Robinson, Matteus Gilbert, and Manager Vince O'Neal. Front Row: Juan Morales, Jeyson Resendiz, Darvin Contreras, Matt Kalna, Kalai Samick, Kyle Tillet, Jordi Perez

