

Vernonia Boosters Look for More Parent Involvement

By Scott Laird

Vernonia Booster Club, a local non-profit organization which oversees non-school youth sports and activities, is looking to recruit more volunteers from the community.

A shortage of adult volunteers has been an ongoing issue and is starting to reach a point where it's impacting the ability of the organization to provide all the activities for community youth that they would like.

"A lot of our participants go on to be members of our local middle school and high school teams," says Booster secretary Jenn Rau. "It's really rewarding to help a kid get started in a sport and teach them about teamwork, and then see them go on to be successful at a higher level. Even if someone doesn't have a kid in youth sports Boosters is still a great way to get involved in the community."

The Boosters organization in-

cludes soccer, little guy football, basketball, wrestling, baseball, T-ball, and softball. They also recently began sponsoring the Vernonia SK8 club, which is working to construct a skate park in Vernonia; the Mat Pack wrestling program was also a recent addition to the Booster programs. In addition to promoting, organizing, and managing these youth activities in the community, the Boosters also fundraise year round, provide scholarships to youth participants to assist them in joining a sport, and provide scholarships to graduating seniors from Vernonia High School. Rau holds an equipment swap every year for softball so kids can exchange items they've outgrown and players in need of uniforms and equipment can get it inexpensively. The Boosters have also volunteered at the Vernonia Marathon.

Jason Busch is the current President of the Boosters. "We recently changed our by-laws to encompass things like the skate club so we can do



more to support youth and their extra curricular activities in the community, not just sports" explains Busch.

Booster programs are some of the very limited organized activities for youth in a small rural community like Vernonia. They provide an important opportunity for kids to be social and make friends, get off the couch and exercise, and be part of something bigger than themselves. "A lot of kids only play because their friends are also playing," says Busch.

"As a coach, you develop a bond with the kids," adds Rau. "I've also made a lot of friends through coaching the kids."

Busch and Rau say a shortage of volunteers is becoming a real issue for the organization. "We haven't had little guy football for several years because we haven't had enough kids or volunteers," says Busch. "We have one parent who has stepped forward, but without more volunteers, we probably won't be able to get it going again this coming year." The Boosters also recently gave up their annual fireworks sale for 4th of July, a really good fundraiser, because of a lack of volunteers.

Rau explains that each sport program has a board that manages and makes decisions for that individual sport. "We could use at least one more person on each of our boards," says Rau. The Boosters Board of Directors includes executive officers Busch and Rau, along with treasurer Robert Bentley, and Katie Poetter, and a representative from each individual sport or activity. The Board of Directors set general policy. In addition to serving on the Board of Direc-

tors, Busch also heads up the baseball program and Rau heads up softball.

"We're all getting stretched a little thin," says Rau. "A lot of us, on top of being on an individual sport board, and the Board of Directors, also coach a sport."

"I don't think people realize how much effort goes into everything we do," adds Busch.

Busch believes the connection between youth sports and school sports is important for the development of those upper level programs. "Before I became President I know there was a break between Boosters and the schools," says Busch. Busch says the Boosters have been trying to rebuild that relationship by attending school coaches meetings and helping with the purchase of uniforms. "We're trying to be more proactive in helping our kids all the way from kindergarten until they finish school here," he says.

"A lot of people think Boosters is a really big commitment," says Rau. Realistically the Board of Directors meets six to eight times a year and then each sport meets a few times each season with most members being delegated some sort of responsibility to help the whole program come together. "We understand that the parents who want their kids to play these sports have their own responsibilities and commitments, but we really need them to take an active role."

"We're all volunteers, so we try not to meet unless we have some real business to conduct," adds Busch.

Rau points out that Boosters

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