

SHAWNEE
SOCCER CLUB

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Autumn hails the time when hundreds of kids mill about at Stump Park and it's not unusual to hear over and over again, "for the kids." Consider it the Shawnee Soccer Club's ongoing theme.

Soccer is synonymous with this time of year and Shawnee is fortunate to have its own homegrown soccer club with a long history in the community. The organization formed more than three decades ago in 1973. According to Phil Crosley, president of the Shawnee Soccer Club and working with a board of 20 volunteers, the club has become one of the largest youth soccer programs in the state with an enrollment of almost 3,000 kids, ranging in age from 4 to 15.

"It's pretty much all run by volunteers," he says. "This is the third largest club in the state." Crosley

has been involved for about eight years, starting as a spectator when his two daughters began playing the sport. Now they kick around in the club's recreational division.

FAMILY TEAMS

Three of Kristie Cleaver's four children are on Shawnee Soccer Club teams and they know they level of involvement first-hand; her youngest is still too young for the program. For this Shawnee family, as well as many others, fall means breezy days on the soccer fields.

"It's all about soccer at this house," says Cleaver, who played soccer in college and still plays in an adult league. Seven years ago she began coaching her son Zack's team when her daughter Kaylee was a newborn, and now her 5-year-old daughter Kennedy plays. "I got the call they needed a coach, so there I went," she says.

She has coached each of her three children's teams at one point or another. And like so many other parents of players in the club, she volunteers her time—for the kids.

"I love the sport and I love the kids. It's so great to see them catch a concept. It's also a great way to keep kids active," Cleaver says. "For us, since I have

some background in the sport, as a coach we are interactive with each other on another level. At home, it gives us an excuse to kick the ball around and be outside together. Sometimes it comes to just going out and doing the basic concepts and having fun."

MAKING GOALS

As a sport for children, soccer is effective in keeping players involved while also giving back to the community and promoting team dynamics. The Shawnee Soccer Club's cleat exchange lets players donate and reuse gear, and a field marshal program allows individuals to maintain sideline decorum so referees can concentrate on the game and the players.

Sportsmanship on and off the field is encouraged with the club's "Enjoy the Game" program, which keeps play in check. In addition, the club's service-oriented nature extends to donating lightly used equipment, jerseys and used soccer balls to churches in South America as well as to Oceans of Mercy in Shawnee that supplies soccer goods to kids in Iraq.

"We're definitely trying to do it well," says Crosley. The club strives to keep the kids, and the game, at the forefront. He notes the club's relationship with the city of Shawnee is good and the group works closely with the Shawnee Parks and Recreation Department to keep soccer facilities in premium shape.

"We've bought shelter houses and a lot of our members use it for soccer parties. Also, it's great for refs and teams to get a break from the sun," says Crosley, adding that one shelter at Gum Springs Park is currently being redone.

KEEPING SCORE

Over the years, the club has built a strong program with an equally strong reputation of doing things for kids.

Volunteer coaches get a great opportunity to teach young players about character during a game and outside of soccer. Many of the 300 to 350 recreation league coaches are parent volunteers. Nearly all coaches of the elite teams are licensed, and some have played college soccer. In addition, the club has developed a relationship with the Challenger Sports soccer camp organization to provide trainers and techniques for improving players' game.

During the season free weekly clinics, led by one of the licensed trainers, are offered for interested players.

"I think the program offers kids of all ages, on all skill levels, something. When you click with the right team, it's great," says Annie Rogers, whose daughter plays in the recreation division. Rogers

also used to coach her daughter's team. "It's healthy fun. There are lots of opportunities for family involvement as well. We've had a very positive experience."

"Different kids respond differently," notes Cleaver. "Some have a very competitive drive; some just want to play with their friends. Really it's about letting them get out there and have fun with their team."

Crosley says Shawnee Soccer Club provides a great opportunity to instill confidence and gives players a chance to succeed, even outside of soccer. Other benefits include exhibiting sportsmanship, working together and learning the game.

Yet the most rewarding aspect of the club for Crosley and many of the parents is doing it for the kids.

"On the most basic level, going out to the fields and seeing all the kids out there playing and enjoying their soccer experience and developing friendships," he says. **ISM**

Kristie Cleaver, soccer coach and mom, has been coaching and cheering since son Zack began playing more than seven years ago. Today she is also involved with Kennedy, left, and Kaylee's teams.

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Falling for **SOCCER**

The Shawnee Soccer Club keeps families and kids busy on the field



The Shawnee Soccer Club has made a name for itself in the world of youth soccer. The Roger's family is one of many involved in the program. Big sister, Emelie, practices with twin brothers Alex and Luke.

ALONG THE SIDELINES

During soccer weekends the fields are dotted with players and parent-filled sidelines. Usually somewhere nearby are several, often younger, siblings.

We've put together some parents' favorite tips for brother and sister spectators.

Pack some snacks and drinks. Fruit snacks, crackers, cheese sticks or good old PB&J are sideline staples for some families. A wet cloth, bagged in plastic, for the little ones also comes in handy.

Bring along an extra ball. The siblings can kick the soccer ball and play with their friends. During halftime, they can hit the empty field and try to score a goal. If soccer isn't their thing, a soft football, Koosh ball or Frisbee is great entertainment.

Pass the time with a deck of cards or a card game like UNO. Board games don't transport well and the windy conditions along a soccer field don't work well with elaborate games.

Get artsy. Colored pencils or a small pack of crayons along with an art pad, spiral notebook or coloring book are often a hit.

Get glamorous. For the young ladies, a makeshift hair salon complete with scrunchies and brushes is always popular.